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Rana Polity in Nepal

Rana Polity in Nepal

ORIGIN AND GROWTH

SATISH KUMAR

*Issued under the Auspices of the
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Preface

THIS BOOK is a revised version of the author's dissertation, "Political System of Nepal under the Ranas: 1846-1901," submitted to the University of Delhi through the Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, in 1961, and approved by the University of Delhi in 1962 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The book deals with the origins and growth of the Rana political system in Nepal in the nineteenth century. The study of Rana institutions and their working during the first 55 years (1846-1901) of their rule is preceded by a discussion of the political conditions prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century, which ultimately led to the emergence of the Rana polity. The Rana polity, as it grew up to 1901, remained basically the same till its end in 1951. The present study may, therefore, provide a perspective to the Rana period as a whole.

The study is based on Nepali language documents, archival records of British India, and interviews with many eminent persons from various walks of life in Nepal. The author is grateful to them as also to His Majesty's Government of Nepal for the necessary facilities extended to him.

The author is indebted to Dr. Leo E. Rose, Dr. D.R. Regmi, Mr. M.C. Regmi, and Dr. Mahendra Kumar for their valuable suggestions in the revision of the dissertation.

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New Delhi

SATISH KUMAR

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Introduction

THE MODERN PERIOD of Nepalese history is supposed to have begun with the conquest of the Kathmandu valley by the Gurkhas in 1769. Since then, Nepal has undergone various ups and downs as regards the powers and position of monarchy. From 1769 to 1846, the king was powerful and ruled with the aid of some members of the nobility. Towards the end of this period, however, his power began to wane as a result of the successive minority of kings and the consequent emergence of powerful ministers, although the king continued to be the *de jure* head of the state up to the end. From 1846 to 1951, the king was only a nominal ruler, as he had been forced to sign away part of his sovereign power to the Rana Prime Minister who could at times even coerce the king. The prime Minister was the *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. After the overthrow of the Ranas in 1951, the king regained his lost power. And up to 1960, he functioned merely as a constitutional head, though at times he wielded real power also. In 1960, the king dismissed the first elected government of Nepal and resumed direct and absolute control of the state. He promulgated a new constitution in 1962 and assumed complete powers thereunder.

Of all the phases of Nepal's modern history mentioned above, the one from 1846 to 1951 is the most important because of its two main characteristics: one, for one hundred and five years at a stretch, a family of usurpers (the Ranas) ruled the country without having legitimate claim to power; and, two, the rulers, in the process of ruling selfishly and dictatorially, developed anachronistic political institutions which not only hampered the growth of the country in the relevant period but also had important repercussions on developments in post-Rana Nepal. The Ranas followed a policy of keeping Nepal isolated from the rest of the world. Therefore, while the foundations of modern economic and political system were being laid in the rest of Asia as a result of its contacts with the Western world, Nepal remained static under a decadent and feudalistic Rana regime. Although Nepal continued to have a monarchical government, the traditional authority of the king was suppressed during this period and was substituted by that

of a family oligarchy. The senior-most member of this oligarchy was the prime minister who exercised despotic power. Succession to the prime ministership took place hereditarily by the agnatic law according to a roll of succession prepared by the ruling prime minister. The prime minister derived his support mainly from the members of his family and favourites who were allowed to exercise some power through various administrative institutions of which they were given the charge from time to time. Nepal was reduced to the position of a personal estate of the Ranas.

This retrogressive political system owed its origin to a combination of historical and geographical factors. The eighteenth century history of Nepal bequeathed to the nineteenth century a long succession of minor kings giving rise to a number of warring factions of nobility. For well over a quarter of a century there was a crisis of power in the country, the king, the queens, the princes and the various factions of the nobility all set against each other in a struggle for authority. Out of this anarchy arose a clever and sturdy high-caste man who could manage to get his political adversaries killed in a large-scale court massacre in 1846. The man was Jang Bahadur who became the first Rana Prime Minister on the morrow of the massacre and laid in course of years the foundations of the Rana political system. Having had sufficient experience of the way the kings and *mukhtiyars* had functioned over the previous half a century, he evolved legal and administrative instruments of power to keep the country under his tight control.

Geography also played a role in the origin and sustenance of this system. Nepal is a hilly country with insuperably difficult terrain. She is sheltered in the north by the till-recently invincible Himalayas and in the south by the 10,000 feet high Mahabharat range. None has so far ventured to conquer her. In a difficult terrain, without any line of communication with the outside world, it was difficult even for the British Government in India to keep control over Nepal. Thus Nepal remained independent while the rest of the Indian subcontinent came under the British rule. One consequence of it was that Nepal was isolated from the mainstream of the life of the subcontinent. This isolation served well the interests of the Rana rulers who, keeping their country deliberately closed to external liberal influences, could easily build and maintain a conservative and retrogressive political system.

The outmoded Rana polity was sustained also by the more or less tribal culture and caste-ridden society of Nepal. Nepal's population is an aggregation of several tribes. Some of them like Tharus, Dhimals and Danwars inhabit the swampy forests of the Tarai. The hill tribes such as Tamangs, Gurungs, Thakalis, Magars, Rais and Limbus live in the mountainous regions above the Tarai. The Mongoloid-looking Newars inhabit the Kathmandu valley and other trade centres. Bhoteas and Sherpas having strong ethnic and cultural ties with the Tibetans live in the regions of the extreme north. There is little social intercourse among these tribes, on account of the difficult terrain of the country. The society has not yet outgrown the insular tribal organisation. Further, the caste played havoc with Nepalese society, keeping it hierarchical and fragmented. Brahmans and Kshatriyas have always enjoyed supreme positions. The Brahmans as state priests and interpreters of Hindu law wielded great influence on the Kshatriya rulers. In emergency, the Brahmans were entrusted even with the reins of government. They were exempt from capital punishment. Thakuris (high-grade Kshatriyas) have been the kings of Nepal for the last two hundred years. The high civil and military offices of the state have always been held by Thakuris. So great was the effect of the Thakuri domination that even the Ranas who originally belonged to a much inferior caste declared themselves as Thakuris to justify and facilitate the exercise of powers which they had usurped. Untouchability with regard to a number of lower castes is still practised in Nepal in spite of the rights of equality guaranteed by the new constitution and the reforms introduced by the new *muluki ain*. Thus the growth of tyrannical Rana institutions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could not be resisted by the tribal and caste-ridden Nepalese society which is still not really a homogeneous, modern society.

The economy of Nepal was as exploitative and tyrannical as her society. In a country with a primarily agricultural economy, land is the chief source of revenue. But most of the land was possessed by the ruling Ranas and priestly classes. And the whole land was tilled by primitive means. There were not even rudiments of industry until the third decade of the present century. Trade in limited proportions was confined to India and Tibet. There was no education and no professional or other middle classes.

The Rana totalitarian institutions thrived in the context of the geographic and socio-economic conditions stated above. Even though the basic character of Nepalese society did not undergo any change and the geographical factors also remained the same, the forces of history did not permit the Rana institutions to continue and brought about their end by the middle of the present century.

Territorial Expansion

NEPAL HAS BEEN described as a "valley,"¹ on the southern side of the Himalayas, in the references available in the Nepali *vamsavalis* (genealogical histories).² According to the legend also the Kathmandu valley only was considered as Nepal proper. Further, in the *Skand-Puran*, the boundaries of Nepal have been stated as follows:³ River Kosi in the east, River Trisul Gandaki in the west, Shivapuri Hills in the north, and *Sitalodaka*⁴ in the south. In the middle of the eighteenth century the territorial limits of Nepal, which at that time included the three kingdoms of Bhatgaon, Patan and Kathmandu, coincided more or less with the boundaries mentioned above. But the present boundaries of Nepal cover an area many times more extensive including the numerous states to the far east and west of the valley, which were independent in the eighteenth century. This is the result of a series of wars of conquest which continued from the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The various stages through which this territorial expansion of Nepal took place will briefly be dealt with below.

Nepal and Her Neighbours in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

Originally the Kathmandu valley was a single kingdom. But in 1457 King Yaksha Malla divided it into three kingdoms—Bhatgaon, Kathmandu and Patan—and distributed them among his three sons. Of these three, Bhatgaon⁵ covered the largest territory which

¹Daniel Wright, ed., *History of Nepal* (London, 1877; 2nd Indian edition, Calcutta, 1958) 45.

²Indigenous historical records of Nepal are mostly available in this form.

³Surya Vikram Gyawali, *Prithvi Narayan Shah*, (Darjeeling, 1992 Vikram Samvat) 7. (Nepali). ("Vikram Samvat" will henceforth be referred to as V.S.)

⁴"A river of cold water" flowing near Chisapanigarhi to the south of the valley.

⁵About 7 miles east of Kathmandu.

extended beyond the valley up to the River Dud Kosi in the eastern hills. In the west its territory touched River Bagmati which also formed the eastern boundary of Kathmandu. Kathmandu extended up to the River Trisul Gandaki in the west, the Kuti Pass in the north, and Mahabharat jungles in the south. The Trisul Gandaki was also the western boundary of the entire Nepal. Gorkha,⁶ a kingdom which subsequently conquered Nepal, was situated to the west of Trisul Gandaki. The kingdom of Patan⁷ lay to the south of Kathmandu, the two being divided by the River Bagmati. In the south, the boundary of Patan went as far as the Mahabharat jungles. Nepal remained divided into three kingdoms up to 1769. Of these, Bhatgaon and Kathmandu were always separate and generally in a state of rivalry, though Patan occasionally united with Kathmandu.

This disunited Nepal was surrounded in the east and the west by a large number of independent states. In the near east beyond the River Kosi was the country of Kiratas and Limbus, and further eastwards was that of Lepchas. In the hilly region in the west, i.e. between the River Trisul Gandaki and the River Kali, there were two sets of states known by their numbers as the *Chaubisi* (twentyfour) and the *Baisi* (twentytwo). These states were situated in the Sapt-Gandaki and the Karnali basins respectively. Some of these consisted of only a few hilly villages. Others comprised large areas in the hills as well as the plains. They had relations with the Muslim states of India. Some of these states were ruled by the rajas of the native hill stock but most of them, large and important ones, were ruled by Kshatriya kings⁸ who had fled from India during the Muslim invasions between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹

The historical data regarding these *Chaubisi* and *Baisi* states is

⁶Gorkha was a kingdom in the western hills of Nepal, about 45 miles north-west of Kathmandu. The people of Gorkha are referred to as the "Gurkhas," though colloquially all the military tribes of Nepal came to be described as "Gurkhas."

⁷About 3 miles south of Kathmandu.

⁸For example, the Sena King of Palpa, the Malla King of Parbat, and the Shah King of Gorkha were all Kshatriyas coming from India. See Gyavali, n. 3, 11 and 15.

⁹Gyavali, n. 3, 16.

inadequate.¹⁰ However, it is certain that all these states were independent. The names *Chaubisi* and *Baisi* signified a loose conglomeration of a number of states in a particular region and did not imply any kind of permanent political union. These states often fought with one another. They were rendered weak by their internecine quarrels, lack of leadership and unity, and due to out-moded methods of warfare and administration. Sometimes the weaker states joined and sought the protection of the stronger among them.

The Rise of Gorkha

Of all these states, Gorkha was destined to play a very significant role in the history of modern Nepal. It was conquered in 1559¹¹ by Dravya Shah, a descendant¹² of one of the Kshatriya kings from India. His Rajput heritage with its tradition of warfare and the fact that his subject people (Magars) are one of the most hardy and adventurous tribes of the hills of Nepal gave him certain advantages over the neighbouring kings. The situation of Gorkha on a very high hill¹³ further put him in a strategically favourable position. Naturally, he could afford to cast covetous eyes on territories beyond his kingdom. During the major part of his rule (1559-70) he continued to be at war with his neighbour, the king of Lamjung. He succeeded in conquering only two small territories named Sihranchoke and Ajirgarh.¹⁴

His successors continued the process of conquest during the next two centuries in two phases, namely, (i) the conquest of neighbouring states by Gorkha and its emergence as an enlarged and powerful kingdom in 1742 and (ii) the conquest of Nepal by Gorkha

¹⁰There is disagreement still about the actual names of some of these states, and difficulty about tracing their complete and reliable lists. For probable lists of the *Chaubisi*, see Gyavali, n. 3, 18-20; and Francis Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Edinburgh, 1819) 238. For the *Baisi*, see Hamilton, 280. For further details, see D. R. Regmi, *Modern Nepal* (Calcutta, 1961) 1-13.

¹¹The date of conquest is 26 July. See Gyavali, n. 3, 30.

¹²Dravya Shah was a younger brother of the king of Lamjung which is about 30 miles north-west of Gorkha. His detailed ancestry is discussed in Chapter 2.

¹³Hamilton, n. 10, 244.

¹⁴Gyavali, n. 3, 31.

in 1769.

In the first phase, Gorkha fought some infructuous wars with Lamjung, but no considerable gains were acquired till the time of Ram Shah (1606-33). The conquests of Ram Shah extended the frontiers of Gorkha substantially up to Rivers Chepe-Marsyandi in the west, Tehsil Dhading in District Nuwakot in the east, and Kairung Pass, including Rasua,¹⁶ in the north.

Besides these conquests in the neighbourhood, Gorkha also established in this period friendly relations with important kingdoms, e.g. Parbat, Palpa and Jumla in the hills, and Patan in the valley. The social, economic and political reforms introduced by Ram Shah also added to the fighting strength of Gorkha which thereby rose to a position of eminence as one of the major kingdoms in the hills.

For a considerably long period after Ram Shah, Gorkha's territorial extent remained unchanged. In 1737, Nar Bhupal Shah unsuccessfully attempted to conquer Nuwakot, a town nearly 16 miles north-west of Kathmandu and strategically very important for the conquest of the valley. The only piece of territory gradually appropriated by Gorkha before the accession of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1742 was the one lying between Dhading and River Trisul Gandaki in the east. However, Gorkha at this time was at the zenith of its power. Its territories stretched up to the Himalayas in the north, the River Seti in the south, Rivers Chepe-Marsyandi in the west and the River Trisul Gandaki in the east.¹⁶ Further annexations made by Prithvi Narayan Shah led to the conquest of Nepal in 1769.

The Conquest of Nepal

Kings of Gorkha had had grievances¹⁷ against the kings of the valley ever since the time of Dambar Shah (1633-42) and they wanted to conquer them. In order to achieve this purpose, Nar Bhupal Shah, as stated earlier, made an unsuccessful attempt to conquer

¹⁶Situated on the Tibetan border, it marks the northern boundary of Nepal in this region up to the present day.

¹⁶Gyavali, n. 3, 54.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 50.

Nuwakot. Further, in order to facilitate the conquest of the valley from the south, he arranged the marriage¹⁸ of his son Prithvi Narayan Shah with the daughter of the Raja of Makwanpur.¹⁹ The valley was ultimately conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah in two phases, namely, the conquest of Nuwakot and the conquest of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon.

To conquer Nuwakot, Prithvi Narayan Shah, after an abortive first attempt, undertook a trip to Kashi to seek financial assistance and military reinforcement. He took the following steps on his return: (i) appointed Kalu Pande,²⁰ an old playmate who later became his most trusted officer, as *Kaji*²¹ with the charge of planning every aspect of the conquering expeditions; (ii) established a number of arsenals, distributed arms among the people, and trained his army in the use of guns²² brought from Kashi; and (iii) sent envoys to the powerful neighbouring courts of Lamjung, Kaski, Palpa, Tanhu, etc., to seek their active assistance or neutrality in Gorkha's war against Nepal. Most of these kingdoms, however, refused active assistance but remained neutral when the war started. Nuwakot was invaded at a time when dissensions among the kings of Nepal were at their worst and was conquered in the fall of 1744.²³

The annexation of Nuwakot proved advantageous to the Gurkhas in the conquest of the valley in many ways. It raised the morale of the Gurkha army. It undermined the economic prosperity of Kathmandu whose trade line with Tibet (i.e. Nuwakot) passed into the enemy's control. It sharpened the dissension between Kathmandu and Bhatgaon which was happy at Nuwakot having been torn away from the former. The Gurkhas shifted their military headquarters to Nuwakot in order to embark upon the invasion of Nepal more efficiently.

During his stay for about three years with the King of Bhatgaon

¹⁸According to a Nepali source, Prithvi Narayan Shah had two wives, the second being the daughter of a Rajput from Banaras named Ahiman Singh.

¹⁹A place about 25 miles south of Kathmandu, then a separate kingdom.

²⁰His ancestor Ganesh Pande had helped Dravya Shah in the conquest of Gorkha. His descendants played important part in the later history of Nepal.

²¹*Kaji* in Nepal then was the designation for a minister of the king.

²²Used for the first time in the history of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

²³Gyavali, n. 3, 83.

at the instance of his father Nar Bhupal, Prithvi Narayan Shah had, around 1732, acquired an intimate knowledge of the internal politics of Nepal. In 1764, the people of Patan whose ruling dynasty had collapsed invited him to be their king. He declined the invitation but sent his younger brother, Dalmardan Shah. He was aware of the increasing rivalry between Bhatgaon and Kathmandu as also of the intensified state of internal revolt against the raja in the latter kingdom. He exploited these chaotic conditions in Nepal and, by playing up its kings against one another, captured strategic areas around the valley. A truce negotiated with Lamjung safeguarded his western flank.²⁴ By a combination of diplomacy, manpower, fighting skill and brutality, he successively conquered Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon.²⁵ The whole of Nepal came under his domain by 1769 when he shifted his capital to Kathmandu.

The long cherished desire of Gorkha to conquer Nepal was fulfilled. But Gorkha became a part of bigger Nepal whose boundaries now extended to the River Dud Kosi in the east and Rivers Chepe-Marsyandi in the west. The next stage in Nepal's expansion to its present size was the annexation of adjoining kingdoms in the west and the east.

The Conquest of Adjoining Kingdoms (1769-1814)

Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first Gurkha King of Nepal, was too ambitious to rest content with merely the conquest of the valley. His military organisation and resources were nowhere near exhaustion. He started a campaign of conquest and annexation of territories to the west and the east. This was continued by his successors till the expanding Nepal came in conflict with a more powerful neighbour in the south, the British, in 1814. The main stages in this process were as follows.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 104.

²⁵Their years or dates of conquest are: Kirtipur, 1766; Kathmandu, 25 September 1768; Patan, January 1769; Bhatgaon, 1769. For detailed authentic accounts of the conquest of the valley, see Father Giuseppe's "Account of Nepal" in Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul* (London, 1811) 380-6; Gyavali, n. 3, 152-62; and Regmi, n. 10, Chapter 3.

During Prithvi Narayan Shah's rule, which lasted up to 1775,²⁶ Nepal first attacked the *Chaubisi* states to protect its western domains, particularly the ruler's home state Gorkha, from incursions from the west. After some initial successes, Nepal had to withdraw because of the strong resistance from Tannahung (or Tanhu). In the east, however, the Gurkha army which was sent to conquer the Kirata country after 1770 achieved much greater success. It had conquered the territory up to the River Arun²⁷ by 1773. Thus in the lifetime of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the boundaries of Nepal in the west remained up to the River Marsyandi, but in the east extended up to the River Arun.

Pratap Singh Shah²⁸ (1775-78) conquered some of the *Chaubisi* states, and also attempted to advance towards Sikkim.

Further expansion westwards took place during the regency of the Queen Mother Rajendra Lakshmi²⁹ (1778-85). Her famous General Ram Krishna Rana pushed Nepal's borders to Kaski and Gurumkote, conquering on the way the gallant Tannahung and Gorkha's traditional rival Lamjung.

However, it was under the regency of Bahadur Shah³⁰ (1785-94) that Nepal not only consolidated her previous gains but also made considerable further expansion in the west and the east. Some brilliant expeditions were undertaken in the west under the able command of Generals Damodar Pande, Ram Krishna Rana and Amar Singh Thapa. All the *Chaubisi* and *Baisi* states except Palpa³¹ were subjugated. The Gurkha forces also entered Kumaon beyond the *Baisi*, but concluded a treaty with its raja. Their attempts to expand northwards at the expense of Tibet brought Nepal into serious clashes with Tibet. This, in addition to other causes, led to

²⁶The date of Prithvi Narayan Shah's death is given by different authorities as anything from 1771 to 1775. The year 1775 is given by Wright, n. 1, 158. This is an oftquoted and reliable work, a translation from a Nepali *vamsavalī*.

²⁷Gyavali, n. 3, 174.

²⁸Son and successor of Prithvi Narayan Shah.

²⁹Assumed regency because Pratap Singh Shah's son Ran Bahadur Shah who succeeded in 1778 was a minor.

³⁰The minor king's uncle who assumed regency after the Queen Mother's death.

³¹Being the strongest of the *Chaubisi* states, Bahadur Shah concluded with it a temporary alliance and secured its assistance in conquering the rest of the *Chaubisi*. As its share of the conquests, Palpa received from Bahadur Shah the territories of Ardhā, Khanchi and Gulmi.

a war in which China came to the latter's rescue. Nepal sued for peace³² when the Chinese forces came as far as Nuwakot, within twenty miles of Kathmandu. The Gurkhas gained nothing in this expedition. They made some further conquests in the east. Thus the territories of Nepal under Bahadur Shah were extended up to the River Kali in the west and the borders of Sikkim in the east.

Nepal's glorious era of expansion was interrupted for a while with Bahadur Shah's dismissal in 1794.³³ There followed a period of confusion³⁴ at the court during which the regency changed hands from one queen of Ran Bahadur Shah to another. But in spite of the confusion and irrespective of the regent, Generals Damodar Pande and Amar Singh Thapa conquered Kumaon and Garhwal and invaded Kangra. By 1803, the Gurkhas held sway over the territory from the borders of Kashmir to the heart of Sikkim.

Palpa, the last of the independent *Chaubisi* states, was annexed by Ran Bahadur Shah after his return from exile in 1804.³⁵

The next phase of Nepal's expansion started with the appointment of Bhim Sen Thapa as *mukhtiyar*, or chief minister, after the death of Ran Bahadur Shah in April 1806. Bhim Sen Thapa, the strongest man³⁶ in the realm, was gifted with special military and administrative talent. He realised the territorial vastness of the kingdom over

³²By the Sino-Nepalese Peace Treaty of 1792 concluded after this war, Nepal was required to send to the Chinese Emperor a quinquennial tribute mission. She also surrendered to Tibet the territories at the heads of the Kuti and Kirong passes, which she had conquered in the previous expeditions. For details of the Nepal-Tibet war, see Kirkpatrick, n. 25, 339-44; Schuyler Cammann, *Trade Through the Himalayas* (Princeton, 1951) 121-43; and Regmi, n. 10, 167-207.

³³Dhanvakra Vajracharya and Gyanmani Nepal, ed., *Aitihasik Patrasamgraha* (Kathmandu, 2014 V.S.) I, 78 (Nepali).

³⁴Remarkable of this confusion was the assumption of "majority" by Ran Bahadur Shah, his abdication and exile, succession of his minor son Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah, and changes of the regency. For details of the court politics of this period, see Chapter 2.

³⁵*Foreign Secret Consultation* (26 April 1804) 297, National Archives of India, New Delhi (henceforth referred to as NAI).

³⁶Bhim Sen Thapa was entrusted with the care of the minor King Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah by his father Ran Bahadur Shah at the time of his death in April 1806. Thapa himself became the *mukhtiyar*, made the king's stepmother Lalit Tripura Sundari the regent, and governed Nepal for the next thirty years as the sole authority.

which he was to rule. But he was also aware of the thwarted zest for war of the huge Gurkha army with a long tradition of conquest. The Gurkha army could not remain idle, for war not only justified their existence but also raised their status and incomes considerably.³⁷ Bhim Sen Thapa had to employ them and he decided to do so to conquer the rich and fertile plains in the south.

Nepal's frontiers in the south had been brought in contiguity with those of the British Indian provinces by the cession of the Gorakhpur territory by Nawab-Vazir of Oudh to the East India Company in 1801. But the Gurkhas did not yet have any estimate of the growing might of the British Company. They started incursions in the south and took over several villages which were situated either in the disputed territory or in the British territory proper. The result was a direct clash with the British. After some attempts to settle the dispute by a boundary commission had proved futile, the Gurkhas and the British resorted to war on 1 November 1814.³⁸

Territorial Adjustments

The war ended and the Treaty of Segouli was signed on 2 December 1815, and ratified on 4 March 1816.³⁹

By this treaty, Nepal ceded (to the British) Sikkim and all other territories to the east of the River Mechi; Kumaon, Garhwal and all other territories to the west of the River Kali; and nearly the whole of the Tarai between the Rivers Kosi and Kali.⁴⁰ The Tarai lands between the Rivers Kosi and Rapti were restored

³⁷The Gurkhali army consisted largely of tribes whose sole delight and profession was that of war. A large number of these soldiers were always in reserve. They were called to active service and paid salaries or given promotions only when there was a campaign. Therefore, they always longed for a campaign, in the absence of which the Gurkha government was faced with the problem of employing them usefully, lest they interfere in internal politics of Nepal by playing in the hands of one political faction or the other. This state of affairs continued until the British Government started recruiting the Gurkha soldiers.

³⁸C.U. Aitchison, comp., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta, 1929) XIV, 46.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 62-4.

to Nepal in December 1816.⁴¹

By the end of 1816, except the Tarai lands between the Rivers Rapti and Kali, Nepal acquired her present size. These Tarai lands along with some others between the River Rapti and the district of Gorakhpur were given to her on 1 November 1860 as a reward for her assistance to the British in the Indian rebellion of 1857-58.⁴² Ever since, the frontiers of Nepal have remained, more or less, unchanged.

It is this enlarged Nepal with the River Kali in the west, the River Mechi in the east, the Himalayas in the north, and the British Indian provinces in the south, whose politics and administration will be studied in the following chapters.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 65-7

⁴²*Ibid.*, 71-2.

Pre-Rana Politics

THE RULERS OF Nepal before its conquest by the Shah dynasty of Gorkha in 1769 are said to have descended from the Licchavis, the Thakuris and the Mallas of India. After the conquest the Shah Kings have ruled Nepal to the present day. This chapter is intended to make a brief survey of the Shah politics before 1846 when the Rana Prime Ministers started ruling after depriving the kings of much of their powers and position.

Shah Kings: Their Origin

The Shah Kings are believed to be the descendants of the Rajput chiefs who fled from Central India during the Mohammedan invasions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and took refuge in the Himalayan hills. The paucity of reliable evidence renders it difficult to state definitively their ancestral place in India and the exact period of their migration. However, according to the legend in Nepal and Udaipur, they were the descendants of the rulers of Chittaur. This is confirmed by some historians of Rajasthan and the *vamsavalis* current in Nepal. According to a historian¹ of Rajasthan, the Shahs were the descendants of one of the sons of Raja Samar Sinha of Chittaur who died in 1301. Another historian² of Rajasthan has traced their origin from the second son of Raja Samar Sinha. In a *vamsavali* written by Chitravilasa during the reign of Gorkha King Ram Shah (1606-33), the Shahs' ancestors are stated to have come from Mewar.³ According to

¹James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London, 1914) I, 210; cited in Surya Vikram Gyavali, *Prithvi Narayan Shah* (Darjeeling, 1992 V.S.) 11 (Nepali).

²Gauri Shankar Hira Chand Ojha, *Rajputane ka Itihas* (Ajmer, 1825) 179, cited in Gyavali, n. 1, 11. The two historians differ as to which son of the Raja of Chittaur was actually the ancestor of the Shahs.

³Gyavali, n. 1, 12.

another well-known Nepali *vamsavali*⁴ which was translated into English and subsequently published in 1877, and has ever since been in wide currency, the Shahs came from the Suryavansi Kings of Chittaur. This *vamsavali* relates the story of the Shahs' forefathers in the following way.

During a Muslim ruler's⁵ invasion of Chittaur, many Rajputs were killed and many others fled from Rajputana. Manmath Ranaji Rava, the younger brother of Fatte Sinha Ranaji Rava of Chittaur, went to Ujjain. In 1495, the younger of his two sons, Bhupal Ranaji Rava, because of a quarrel with his elder brother, left for the northern hills and reached a place called Khilum in Bhirkot in central Nepal.

Bhupal Ranaji had two sons, Khancha Khan and Micha Khan. Micha Khan became the ruler of Nuwakot.⁶ One of his successors, Kulmandan Khan, who had become the sovereign of Kaski,⁷ received from the Emperor at Delhi the title of Sah (or Shah). Yasobam Shah, one of the sons of Kulmandan Shah, became the Raja of Lamjung.⁸ Yasobam Shah had two sons, the elder of whom, Narhari Shah, succeeded to the throne of Lamjung. The younger, Dravya Shah, conquered Gorkha in 1559 and founded the Shah dynasty. Later, one of the descendants of Dravya Shah, named Prithvi Narayan Shah, conquered Nepal. Since then Nepal has been ruled by an unbroken line of the Shah Kings.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's Rule

Prithvi Narayan Shah ruled Nepal for six years, i.e. 1769 to 1775. During this period, he made more conquests eastward. He also undertook measures to safeguard the independence of Nepal, specially against the British, and to make Nepal economically

⁴Daniel Wright, ed., *History of Nepal* (London, 1877; 2nd Indian edition, Calcutta, 1958) 167-73.

⁵The *vamsavali* actually mentions the Mughal Emperor Akbar as having invaded Chittaur. But this is historically wrong, because Akbar was born much after the date of the subsequent events related in the *vamsavali*.

⁶Not the place near Kathmandu, but another place with the same name, far to the west of Kathmandu, in the east of the River Kali Gandaki.

⁷Nearly 10 miles north of Nuwakot.

⁸Nearly 30 miles east of Kaski.

strong. He was deeply suspicious of the Capuchin missionaries in Nepal. He believed that these missionaries had been loyal to the Newar Kings of the valley and that they had divulged secret information to Captain Kinloch who had undertaken a military expedition against the Gurkhas at the request of Newar Kings. As a first step towards eradicating foreign influences from Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah ordered the missionaries to leave the country. The Capuchins left Nepal with their Newar followers in 1769.⁹ Similarly, he suspected foreign traders of anti-national activities¹⁰ and turned them out of the valley. In order to promote economic self-sufficiency and to protect Nepal against foreign exploitation, Prithvi Narayan Shah banned the entry of all foreign traders into Nepal. The Nepalese traders were required to go to Garh Parsa¹¹ in the Tarai and exchange goods with the foreigners. "The foreign traders come to our country and reduce our people to destitution,"¹² said Prithvi Narayan Shah in a discourse to his people. He exhorted the Nepalese to take more interest in cottage industries. His hatred for everything foreign went to the extent of disallowing the entry of even artists and musicians from "the country of the Mughals" who, he warned, would not only drain away the country's wealth but would also pass valuable information on to the enemy. He, therefore, asked the people to patronise the Newar artists of the valley because "money spent on them would ultimately remain within the country."¹³ He was fearful of the British and, therefore, avoided any contact with them. Towards Tibet his policy was not to give any cause for complaint, but if the occasion arose he was prepared to fight. With China, he did not have any special

⁹Gyavali, n. 2, 169.

¹⁰These traders including chiefly the Kashmiris and the Gosains from India had suffered much when Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Nuwakot on the trade route between Tibet and Nepal and made them pay double customs, once at Nuwakot and then at Kathmandu. Since then, they had turned against Prithvi Narayan Shah and had been helping the Newar Kings. Prithvi Narayan suspected one Gosain trader of having helped the East India Company in preparing the Kinloch expedition. See Gyavali, n. 1, 183.

¹¹Garh Parsa lies as a gateway on the trade route between India and Nepal.

¹²Yogi Narharinath and Babu Ram Acharya, eds., *Prithvi Narayan Sah Deva ko Divya Updes* (Kathmandu, 2010 V.S.) 18-9 (Nepali).

¹³*Ibid.*, 28-9.

relations.¹⁴

After Prithvi Narayan Shah

After Prithvi Narayan Shah's death in 1775 his son, Pratap Singh Shah, ruled for three years only. During this short period he continued his father's effort to extend the boundaries of Nepal. His reign was not significant except for two facts: first, he was the last of Gurkha rulers who wielded effective powers as a king; and, secondly, he was the last Gurkha King who acceded to the throne after attaining "majority."¹⁵ He was followed by a long line of kings who came to the throne as minors and remained there as imbecile nonentities amidst the chaos in the court. Commenting on this situation, Sylvain Levi said:

After the son and successor of Prithvi Narayan Shah, a cruel fatality has affected the throne; the kings have been either children of young age, or princes emasculated by precocious debauchery, cloistered in their palace by the party in power, and in any case rigorously isolated from real life and public affairs. Their rare outings, whenever permitted, are watched by reliable agents, who don't allow them to be approached by anybody, and who multiply their enemies under the pretext of some foolish and vague dangers, in order to lead them to confine themselves spontaneously and to agree to remain in seclusion.¹⁶

Such being the condition of the Nepalese kings, regents assumed the responsibilities of the guardians of the throne, and ministers were appointed to conduct the business of the state. Most often the regents looked after their own security and survival rather than of the state. In course of time the ministers acquired more and more power and ultimately were in almost complete control of the state. At times, of course, a queen or a queen mother exercised decisive influence in the court.

¹⁴Gyavali, n. 1, 201.

¹⁵The present King Mahendra who is ruling effectively and who acceded at the age of thirtyfive is the exception to this statement.

¹⁶Translated from Sylvain Levi, *Nepal*, 3 vols., (Paris, 1905-08) I, 288 (French).

This process of the decline of the influence and powers of the kings on the one hand and the enhancement of the powers of the ministers on the other reached its climax in 1846 when, after a large-scale massacre, the kingship finally fell in abeyance and the ministers emerged as absolutely powerful to rule Nepal for the next 105 years. The developments which led to this turning point in the political history of Nepal were as follows.

Ran Bahadur Shah

After the death of Pratap Singh Shah, his son Ran Bahadur Shah succeeded to the throne in 1778 when he was only three years and a half.¹⁷ This necessitated the appointment of a regent. Two candidates happened to have claims to the regency. The first was Bahadur Shah, the infant king's uncle, who had been earlier exiled by Pratap Singh Shah but who returned immediately after his death. The second was Queen Mother Rajendra Lakshmi. After a deadly feud between the two claimants, the queen mother won. Bahadur Shah was exiled again.

The queen mother's regency lasted seven years. Her only important achievement during this period was Nepal's expansion westward under the command of General Ram Krishna Kunwar. After her death in 1785, Bahadur Shah immediately returned to Nepal and took over the regency.¹⁸

Bahadur Shah's regency is important for expansion of the territories of Nepal in the east and in the west.¹⁹ He personally directed all the military campaigns. But he was doomed to meet his end soon at the hands of his nephew, King Ran Bahadur, who had now come of age and could no longer tolerate the suppression and usurpation of his rights. Ran Bahadur dismissed Bahadur Shah in 1794²⁰ and assumed the sovereign power of the state. Thus the regency was terminated. But Ran Bahadur imprisoned Bahadur Shah in the beginning of 1797, at a time when, it is said,

¹⁷Margaret W. Fisher and Leo E. Rose, *England, India, Nepal, Tibet, China, 1765-1958* (Berkeley, 1959) 2.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹See Chapter 1.

²⁰Dhanvajra Vajracharya and Gyanmani Nepal, ed., *Aitihasik Patra Samgraha* (Kathmandu, 2014 V.S.) I, 78 (Nepali).

the youngest queen of Ran Bahadur had got pregnant. Bahadur Shah died in prison after four months.²¹

Ran Bahadur Shah Abdicates

Ran Bahadur, during his infancy, had been kept in a state of utter ignorance and profligacy by his uncle, Bahadur Shah. As such, he grew up to be an unprincipled man given to all kinds of excesses. His laxity of character which was most apparent in his marital relations is said to be the chief cause of his failure as a ruler. As his first wife, Raj Rajeshwari Devi, did not bear any child, he married Suvarna Prabha who gave birth to a son named Ranodyut Shah. Not content with the two wives, he again married, this time a Brahman girl named Kantimati Devi with the promise that her son would be the heir-apparent. Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah was the son born to her in 1797 and Ran Bahadur Shah declared him the heir-apparent. This led to a crisis in Nepal because, first, the third marriage of Ran Bahadur was illegitimate,²² and, secondly, the heir-apparentship for Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah meant the deprivation of the rights of Ranodyut Shah, son of the second queen.

Kantimati Devi, the mother of the heir-apparent, soon fell ill of smallpox. Considering that it was a serious illness, she expressed a desire that her son be enthroned as king during her lifetime. Ran Bahadur Shah could not ignore the wishes of his beloved wife. He abdicated and enthroned Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah as the king in 1799 at the age of a year and a half,²³ in spite of the opposition of the *bharadars* (state councillors). Ran Bahadur himself went to Deva Patan near Kathmandu with the sick queen. This again necessitated the appointment of a regent and the first queen Rajeshwari Devi was appointed to this position.

The Triple Government

Queen Kantimati Devi died shortly afterwards. This was a severe shock to Ran Bahadur. In a state of frenzy and insanity he

²¹*Ibid.*, 77-9.

²²Nepalese law then did not permit a Chhetri marrying a Brahman girl. Since the violation of this law was committed by the king, it invited still greater public attention and remonstrance. An additional fact that aroused the remonstrance was that Kantimati Devi was a widow.

²³Fisher and Rose, n. 17, 3.

committed many political and religious excesses which aroused fresh antagonism amongst the *bharadars* and the Brahmins. One of the *bharadars* named Damodar Pande, a famous general, took the infant king, Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah, to Nuwakot, declared it the capital of Nepal and started ruling from there. During the period of this confusion, Nepal found itself under a triple government of Damodar Pande, ruling from Nuwakot in the name of the king, of Raj Rajeshwari Devi from Kathmandu as the regent, and of Ran Bahadur Shah from Deva Patan^{23a} in his own name.

However, the confusion was soon resolved when, sensing danger to his life, Ran Bahadur fled from Nepal to Banaras, accompanied by his first Queen Raj Rajeshwari Devi and a few generals and officers. He started living there as a saint under the name of Swami Maharaj Maha-Nirvananand. Damodar Pande returned with the infant king from Nuwakot to Kathmandu and started ruling as a chief minister. Suvarna Prabha, the second queen of Ran Bahadur and the infant king's stepmother, got the regency in April 1800.²⁴ Thus the effective power of the state came to be possessed by a minister during the reign of the second minor king. This marked the beginning of the gradual decline of the king's powers.

Pande's Treaty with the British

Because of Ran Bahadur's presence in Banaras, Damodar Pande feared that the British may align themselves with Ran Bahadur against the ruling clique at Kathmandu. He, therefore, hastened to conclude a treaty with the British in October 1801.²⁵ The treaty was intended ostensibly to promote friendship between the two countries. For this, the treaty provided *inter alia* for the

^{23a}According to another Nepali source, Ran Bahadur Shah at this time was at Patan and not at Dev Patan, because he was planning an invasion of Nuwakot from Patan. See D. Vajracharya and G. Nepal, n. 20, 98.

²⁴Fisher and Rose, n. 17, 3.

²⁵The treaty was ratified by the Governor General in Council of India on 30 October 1801, and by the Nepal Darbar on 28 October 1802. See C.U. Aitchison, comp., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta, 1929) XIV, 61-2.

appointment of their diplomatic envoys at each other's capital. But no less important purpose of the treaty was to keep Ran Bahadur Shah away from Kathmandu, as is obvious from Article 9 of the treaty.^{25a} This treaty proved the precursor of another change in the locus of power at Kathmandu.

Ran Bahadur Shah, who had been quite upset by the treaty, started preparations to return to Kathmandu and recapture power. As a first step, he sent the first Queen Raj Rajeshwari Devi to Kathmandu on the pretext that she was disgusted with her husband's licentious life at Banaras. In the face of the opposition the Regent Suvarna Prabha, Rajeshwari Devi reached Kathmandu in 1803, helped by the loyal army which had originally been sent to stop her advance towards the capital. She took over the regency from the second queen who had almost lost the confidence of the *bharadars*. Damodar Pande was also dissatisfied with the second queen because she had favoured one of his opponents. He welcomed Raj Rajeshwari Devi as the regent. But this alliance between Chief Minister Damodar Pande and Regent Raj Rajeshwari Devi was only temporary. The regent knew that she needed Damodar Pande as only a cover for her attempts to bring back Ran Bahadur Shah.

Ran Bahadur Shah's Return

Rajeshwari Devi abrogated the 1801 treaty with the British against the wishes of Damodar Pande. She sent money to Ran Bahadur Shah at Banaras to repay the debts he had incurred. This paved the way for the return of the royal party. Ran Bahadur Shah at the head of his entourage left for Kathmandu in the beginning

^{25a} Article 9 of the Treaty of 1801 and a "Separate Article of a Treaty with the Rajah of Nepaul concluded at Dinapore," dated 26 October 1801, provided for elaborate arrangements under the charge of the British for the maintenance of Ran Bahadur Shah at Banaras with specified entourage and allowances. See *ibid.*, 59-62. Besides, in a Government of India despatch of 24 January 1804, it is clearly stated: "The British Government was pledged to prevent his [Ran Bahadur's] return excepting for the purpose of residing on the Jageer assigned for his maintenance by the treaty of 1801." See letter from Government of India to Secretary to the Resident at Nepal, dated 24 January 1804, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (26 April 1804) 297, NAI.

of 1804.²⁶ But it was intolerable to Damodar Pande. The moment he learnt of the arrival of Ran Bahadur Shah in the valley, he went with his troops to check his advance. The troops on seeing their royal master abandoned Pande and went over to the ex-king. On the advice of one Bhim Sen Thapa, a Rajput general who had been the companion and chief counsellor of Ran Bahadur Shah during the exile, Damodar Pande was immediately arrested. Raj Rajeshwari Devi relinquished the regency and Ran Bahadur Shah became *mukhtiyar*.²⁷ Damodar Pande was executed after some days and was replaced by Bhim Sen Thapa.

Assassination of Ran Bahadur Shah

Ran Bahadur Shah, who resumed effective control of the government, was not destined to rule for long. Some of his acts²⁸ as *mukhtiyar* again antagonised the Brahmans and created widespread opposition. As a result of a conspiracy he was assassinated on 25 April 1806²⁹ by Sher Bahadur, his halfbrother. Bhim Sen Thapa, who at this time was a *kaji*,³⁰ replaced him as *mukhtiyar*.

²⁶Ran Bahadur Shah returned to Kathmandu some time at the end of February or beginning of March 1804, for the letter of the Government of India to the Secretary to the Resident at Nepal referred to in n. 25a above clearly states that after one month of the date of the letter (24 January) Ran Bahadur was at liberty to leave Banaras; and further, according to Fisher and Rose, n. 17, p. 3, Ran Bahadur after reaching Kathmandu became *mukhtiyar* in March 1804.

²⁷Ran Bahadur Shah could not resume kingship because of his earlier abdication and accession of his infant son Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah. Instead, he chose to be the *mukhtiyar* which literally means a chief minister, but presumably, in this case, combined the functions of a chief minister and a regent. There was no separate regent at that time. See also Chittaranjan Nepali, *Bhim Sen Thapa ra Tatakalin Nepal* (Kathmandu, 2013 V.S.) 11 (Nepali).

²⁸He brought under government control all tax-free lands and the property of all religious and charitable institutions. Simultaneously, due to smallpox epidemic in the valley, he sent all the children outside the valley. This was also accompanied by the flight of his first Queen Raj Rajeshwari Devi from the valley. Due to these occurrences and due to the incitement of the Brahmans, the public opinion turned against him.

²⁹Corresponding to 1863 V.S. *Baisakha Sudi* 7. See Chittaranjan Nepali, n. 27, 14.

³⁰Bhim Sen Thapa had been appointed a *kaji* when Ran Bahadur Shah became the *mukhtiyar* and was ever since taking an active part in state affairs. See Chittaranjan Nepali, n. 27, 13.

As King Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah was still a minor, the fifth and the youngest queen of Ran Bahadur Shah named Lalit Tripura Sundari became the regent.

Thus ended the reign of Prithvi Narayan Shah's third successor who, because of his "minority," imbecility and loose character, failed to maintain his hold over the government. The process of "waning kingship" had started in his lifetime when political power was appropriated partly by the regents and partly by the ministers.

Bhim Sen Thapa in Power

The end of Ran Bahadur Shah's reign marked the emergence of another powerful minister, Bhim Sen Thapa, who with the support of the new regent³¹ ruled unrestrained for more than thirty years and nearly established the tradition of "a reigning king but a ruling minister"³² in Nepal.

Bhim Sen Thapa well realised the political situation created by the absence of a strong king after the death of Pratap Singh Shah. He saw his opportunity in the resulting power vacuum. He got rid of most of his enemies by punishing them on the pretext that they were involved in the Sher Bahadur conspiracy which had resulted in the assassination of Ran Bahadur Shah.³³ The regent being friendly to him and the king being a minor, he succeeded in securing from them *lal-mohars*³⁴ by virtue of which he became *mukhtiyar*.³⁵ He was given the charge of all civil and military affairs of the state and all civil and military officers were asked to obey him. Disobedience to the *mukhtiyar* could be punished even by

³¹The fact that Lalit Tripura Sundari, the new regent, was Thapa by caste contributed partly to the mutual support and cooperation between the regent and Bhim Sen Thapa.

³²King Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah died a minor in 1816 and was succeeded by his son Rajendra Bikram Shah who was also a minor of two and a half years. This enabled the Minister Bhim Sen and the Regent Tripura Sundari to continue together for such a long time.

³³Chittaranjan Nepali, n. 27, 15.

³⁴*Lal-mohar* which literally means a red seal is the name given to a legal instrument by which the king confers titles, honours, offices and *jagirs*, ratifies legislation and issues ordinances, etc. It is known as *lal-mohar* because of the red seal which is set on the document along with the royal signatures.

³⁵Chittaranjan Nepali, n. 27, 21-2.

dismissal. The *mukhtiyar* was also empowered to declare war and conclude peace. Bhim Sen Thapa was the first person to get the rank of a general by another *lal-mohar* in the year 1811.³⁶ Later, in 1835, he was made the commander-in-chief by another *lal-mohar* of King Rajendra Bikram Shah.³⁷ According to a Nepalese writer, Bhim Sen Thapa was the most powerful of all the *kajis*, generals, commanders-in-chief and *mukhtiyars* of Nepal, with the exception of the Rana prime minsters.³⁸ That Bhim Sen Thapa had built up for himself an outstanding and unassailable position is also obvious from the fact that the decision in favour of the war against the British in 1814 was taken by him in the face of the opposition of the nobility.³⁹

Another Minor King

King Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah died in 1816 just when he had become a major. He was succeeded by his son, Rajendra Bikram Shah, again a minor of two and a half years. Queen Tripura Sundari, grandmother of the infant king, continued to be the regent. This gave fresh lease to the despotic rule of Bhim Sen Thapa. His powers went on increasing. He kept strict supervision over the infant king to ensure that the king did not grow into a strong independent ruler. He filled most of the civil and military offices of the state with his party men depriving others of all positions of power.

Supremacy of Bhim Sen Thapa

These attempts of Bhim Sen Thapa to assume supreme powers of the state were disliked among others by the British Resident⁴⁰ at Kathmandu, B.H. Hodgson. He was a keen observer of the politics of Nepal. In one of his despatches to his government at Calcutta in 1833, he described the powerful position of Bhim Sen Thapa as follows:

³⁶*Ibid.*, 19-20.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 20.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 111-2 and 117.

⁴⁰The British Residency had been established in Nepal as a result of the Treaty of Segouli in 1816. The Residents disliked Bhim Sen Thapa also for his strong anti-British attitude.

... the Minister ... has grown so great by virtue of two minorities (with but a short interval between them) and thirty years of almost uninterrupted sovereign's way, that he cannot now subside into a subject, and is determined to keep the Raja a cypher, as in his nonage, both with respect to Power, and to observance as far as possible. Almost every post and office is filled by Bhim Sen's creatures; he and his family monopolize all the loaves and fishes; very children ... of his kindred hold high commands; the ancient families of the Pandis, Bashniats, Boharas, Panths, Ranas and others, who in the constitution of this state are entitled to share its counsels and exercise its highest offices are excluded almost wholly from the one and the other, besides being treated with habitual contumely by Mathabar Singh, Bhim Sen's overbearing and heedless nephew.⁴¹

Remarking on the plight to which the king had been reduced by Mukhtiyar Bhim Sen, the Resident said:

The Raja is hemmed into his palace beyond which he cannot stir, unaccompanied by the Minister [i.e. the *Mukhtiyar*], and then only to the extent of a short ride or drive. Even within the walls of his palace, the Minister and his brother both reside, the latter in the especial capacity of a "dry nurse" to His Highness.

Last year, the Raja desired to make an excursion into the lower hills, but he was prevented. ... Of power, he has not a particle, nor seems to wish it; of patronage, he has not a fraction, and is naturally galled at this as well as at being sentinelled all round by Bhim Sen's creatures even within his own abode, and at being debarred from almost all liberty of locomotion, and of intercourse with the sirdars and gentry of the country.

The Raja has been purposely so trained as to possess little energy of body or mind.⁴²

Later, the Resident suspected that the *mukhtiyar* was attempting to brush aside the rights of the king and ultimately usurp the throne

⁴¹Resident B. H. Hodgson to Political Secretary to the Government, Fort William, dated 18 February 1833, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (5 March 1833) 24. NAI.

⁴²*Ibid.*

of Nepal. He elaborated the measures taken by the *mukhtiyar* in this direction in another despatch to his government in 1834:

Bhim Sen has been reinvested, or rather, has reinvested himself, with his heretofore absolute control over the whole affairs of this Government. His brother Ranbeer Singh has been confirmed in the complete civil and military administration of all the Western provinces, as far as Doti; and Mathabar Singh, the Minister's nephew will, it is understood, immediately obtain a like plenary authority in the Eastern provinces.

These arrangements will place 12,000 troops at the back of this one family, and will apparently necessitate the increase of the existing strength of the army, in order to provide for the other chiefs of Nepal. ..

It would seem too that the same arrangements contemplate the ultimate design of permanently setting aside alike the rights of the Prince, and those of the great families of the State, in regard to its administration, and that, in short, Bhim Sen, after two years' intense watching of the Resident's movements has resolved to essay the possibility of usurping the virtual sovereignty of Nepal.⁴³

The Resident indicated the likely consequences of his authoritarian rule in the words: "If Bhim Sen continues to rule unchecked, his death or retirement would be followed by a civil war which would be detrimental to the peace and commerce between two countries [Nepal and India]."⁴⁴

The political situation after the death of Bhim Sen Thapa conformed to the fears expressed by the British Resident. There began a struggle for power within the palace and the nobility. Rapid changes took place in appointments to *mukhtiyari* and there were intrigues and murders which had their climax in the "kot-massacre"⁴⁵

⁴³Resident B.H. Hodgson to C. E. Travelyan, Deputy Political Secretary to the Government, Fort William, dated 20 September 1834, *Foreign Political Consultation* (9 October 1834) 17. NAI.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵A large-scale tragedy that occurred in September 1846 involving the murder of many important civil and military officers. Immediately after the massacre, Jang Bahadur Rana became the prime minister and the Rana rule began. The incident is known as the "kot-massacre" because it took place in the "kot," i.e. the military chamber.

of September 1846.

Fall of Bhim Sen Thapa

The regent, Tripura Sundari, King Rajendra Bikram's grandmother, died in 1832 when the king had just become a major. The long-standing protection and guardianship of Tripura Sundari ended. Bhim Sen was exposed to the manoeuvres and intrigues of the opposing factions. The Pandes led by Ran Jang Pande, son of Damodar Pande who was the victim of Bhim Sen Thapa's counsels, were the leading of these factions. As an attempt to run down Bhim Sen Thapa they found it easy to incite⁴⁶ against him the immature and imbecile king who was himself fed up with his subservience to the *mukhtiyar* and wanted to assert his independence. The first step that the king took to express his indignation against Bhim Sen was to deprive him of all military powers at the *pajani*⁴⁷ of 1837. The king also curtailed the powers of some of his associates and dismissed others. Mathabar Singh Thapa, Bhim Sen's nephew, who was then the governor of Gorkha and the commander of a regiment was also deprived of a part of his salary and also of some of his powers. These measures were supplemented by attempts to strengthen the Pande faction by conferring on its members more powers and privileges.

Shortly after the *pajani*, the youngest son of Rajendra Bikram's senior queen died. This was exploited to work up another plot against Bhim Sen. The Pande intriguers spread the rumour that the child had died of poisoning and that Bhimsen Thapa was the chief conspirer in it. This was a pretext strong enough for the king to arrest Bhim Sen and his associates and confiscate their property. Bhim Sen and his party were released and their property was restored after a trial which continued for eight months disproving all charges

⁴⁶One of the charges put up against Bhim Sen was that he was responsible for Nepal's defeat in the war with the British and the resultant treaty by which so much territory had been stripped off Nepal.

⁴⁷*Pajani* was then a long prevailing institution in Nepal by which the king renewed all civil and military appointments of the state every year, resulting in the continuation or confirmation of the previous appointments, or modifications in the nature and tenure of existing appointments, or dismissals and new appointments. The continuation of appointment was referred to in Nepali as *thamauti*.

against them. But the whole episode meant a considerable loss to Bhim Sen in terms of power and prestige.

Power Comes to the Pandes

After Bhim Sen's arrest, *mukhtiyari* was held for brief periods by various persons in succession. For a few weeks, Ran Jang Pande held this office. Then, Pandit Ranganath Gurujyu, the Rajguru, and Pushkar Shah Chautaria, a collateral of the king, were successively appointed as the *mukhtiyars*. They also resigned after short periods. The king again appointed Ran Jang Pande, the chief opponent of Bhim Sen Thapa and the head of the Pande clan, to this coveted office. Ran Jang Pande had old scores⁴⁸ against Bhim Sen Thapa. Pande thought that his *mukhtiyari* would be useless if he did not succeed in taking revenge against his enemies. He also aspired to the same position of supremacy which was once enjoyed by Bhim Sen. Even though Bhim Sen was now bereft of all real power, Ran Jang naturally regarded his very existence as an obstacle in the fulfilment of his own designs. The first thing that Mukhtiyar Ran Jang did was again to put up against Bhim Sen Thapa the old charge of having poisoned the royal child and get him and his friends arrested. Bhim Sen was sentenced to life imprisonment and confined in a humiliating environment. Some of his friends were tortured to death. Rumours were spread and communicated to Bhim Sen that an insulting and embarrassing treatment would be meted out to his wife. Bhim Sen is said to have committed suicide in prison. He died on 11 August 1839.⁴⁹

The Complex Politics

Bhim Sen Thapa's death created all the problems that usually follow an era of absolutism. His unrivalled supremacy had revealed the weakness of the king and the ineffectiveness of the *bharadars*. King Rajendra Bikram Shah by training and habit could not exercise real power. Even after Bhim Sen's death the king, though a major,

⁴⁸The chief of these was the murder of his father, Damodar Pande, by Ran Bahadur Shah on the advice of Bhim Sen Thapa.

⁴⁹Corresponding to 1896 V.S., *Sravan 16 gate*. See Chittaranjan Nepali, n. 27, 64.

could not think in terms of ruling independently. He felt the need of a *mukhtiyar* who enjoyed the confidence of the army and the nobility to conduct the business of the state. But he was reluctant to concede large powers to him. This created a problem because no *mukhtiyar* could reconcile to having powers less than those once enjoyed by Bhim Sen Thapa.

A few other factors made the situation more complicated. First, there were the interests of King Rajendra Bikram's two queens who supported different political factions. Secondly, it was alleged that the British were also taking sides in the factional fight of Nepalese politics through their Resident. Such factors disturbed the balance of power. A "crisis of power" ensued in which *mukhtiyars* were changed in rapid succession. *De jure* sovereignty of the state was transferred to the junior queen and a number of political murders took place. The situation settled down only after the kot-massacre when "kingship" was put "in abeyance" and the prime minister emerged as the supreme ruler of the kingdom. The following events led to the kot-massacre.

Mukhtiyari Changes Hands

Ran Jang Pande who was the *mukhtiyar* at the time of Bhim Sen Thapa's death could not continue for long. He was dismissed and replaced by Fateh Jang Chautaria at the head of a coalition ministry of four members in November 1840.⁵⁰ Shortly afterwards, the senior queen of Rajendra Bikram Shah who had all through supported the Pandes died of *awal*—malarial fever in the Tarai—on her way to Banaras. This further weakened the Pande faction. However, the situation remained unsettled even after the appointment of Fateh Jang Chautaria as *mukhtiyar* due to the "imbecility of the King ... the ambitious intrigues of the Maharani and the violent and extravagant conduct of the Heir-Apparent."⁵¹ Perhaps the king had not yet come across a strong supporter. The politics of Nepal again became confused. The conflict of interests was too serious to be resolved soon.

⁵⁰Fisher and Rose, n. 17, 6.

⁵¹Henry A. Oldfield, *Sketches from Nepal—Historical and Descriptive* (London, 1880) I, 326.

De jure Sovereignty of the Queen

In the beginning of 1843 the king surrendered his sovereign powers to the surviving junior queen. On 5 January 1843, in the presence of the principal officers of the state in the courtyard of his palace, he made the following proclamation: "Be it known unto all that it is our royal will and pleasure that from this day you do obey Queen Lakshmi Devi [Rajya Lakshmi Devi] as your sovereign." After providing for her the power of awarding death sentence, appointment and dismissal, over all subjects other than members of the royal family, and the power of declaring war or concluding peace with neighbouring countries, the proclamation ended with the words: "We solemnly promise that we will do nothing without her full consent and sanction. We have strictly prohibited all our subjects from obeying the Prince, and whoever does so will render himself liable to punishment under Queen's orders."⁵²

Appointment and Assassination of Mathabar Singh Thapa

Whatever may have been the reasons for this transfer of power, it was another evidence of cracks appearing in the tottering edifice of monarchy in Nepal. Shortly after the assumption of power, the queen appointed Mathabar Singh Thapa as *mukhtiyar* in December 1843.⁵³ The queen's sympathies for the Thapa faction were well known. Mathabar Singh had, in the beginning, the confidence of the king also. But, possessed with all the confidence and strength that Mathabar Singh had, even he found the situation too complex

⁵²Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, *Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur* (Abhay Charan Mukerji, ed., Allahabad, 1909) 36. A widely held explanation for the surrender of sovereignty by the king to the queen (among writers like Henry Oldfield, Sylvain Levi and Pudma Jung Rana) is that a large and powerful delegation consisting of officers and chieftains took to the king a Petition of Rights signed by hundreds of chiefs expressing their grievances against the excesses of the heir-apparent and maladministration of the government. The surrender of sovereign powers to the queen was in acknowledgement of the petition and redress of the grievances. For various views, see Oldfield, n. 51, 327-30; P.J.B. Rana, n. 52, 34-6; and Sylvain Levi, *Nepal*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1905-08) (English translation from the original in French, in typescript, in the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi) I, 366.

⁵³Oldfield, n. 51, 338.

for him. He failed to bring about any reconciliation between the various conflicting interests⁵⁴ that supported his appointment as *mukhtiyar*. He was assassinated in a conspiracy on 17 May 1845.⁵⁵ Fateh Jang Chautaria was again appointed as *mukhtiyar* at the head of a coalition ministry.

The Kot-Massacre

The reappointment of Fateh Jang did not improve the political situation. Events were fast heading towards disaster. In the compromise arrangement that was arrived at for a reconciliation between various interests after Mathabar Singh's death, the king had been reduced to a still weaker position. No doubt Fateh Jang Chautaria, the king's collateral, was the head of the coalition ministry. But the man really powerful was one named Gagan Singh, next to him in the ministry. Gagan Singh was known to be the queen's paramour and an aspirant for supreme power under the protection of the *de jure* sovereign, i.e. the queen. In respect of military power too, Gagan Singh was more powerful than Fateh Jang; he was entrusted with the command of seven regiments as compared to three given to Fateh Jang. Other members of the ministry were Jang Bahadur, supposed to be the representative of the heir-apparent's interests, and Abhiman Singh, one of Fateh Jang's followers but not really representing any interest. Abhiman and Jang Bahadur were ranked as third and fourth in the ministry⁵⁶ and were given the command of three regiments each.

This arrangement which represented a sort of uneasy balance between various interests continued for some time. But by its very nature it could not survive for long. The king felt miserable at the curtailment of his influence and the rapidly growing power of Gagan Singh who had risen from obscurity. Besides, Gagan

⁵⁴The king, having surrendered his powers to the queen, wanted Mathabar Singh to serve as an instrument for the protection of his interests; the queen wanted Mathabar Singh's help in securing succession to the throne for her own son, in suppression of the rights of the heir-apparent who was the son of the late senior queen; the heir-apparent wanted Mathabar's support to cover his own insanity and wildness of behaviour and to protect his lawful right of succession; and Mathabar Singh wanted to exercise independently his minimum rights as *mukhtiyar*.

⁵⁵Oldfield, n. 51, 344.

⁵⁶P.J.B. Rana, n. 52, 62.

Singh's amour with the queen was galling to the king. Gagan Singh became an object of jealousy and hatred for the whole royal family. Due to his low birth and previous occupation, he was not liked by other chiefs. The king planned a conspiracy against Gagan Singh who was shot dead on 14 September 1846.⁵⁷

Thus one more minister died in the series of political murders that were recurring in the history of Nepal. But this one proved to be the most serious, the victim being a royal favourite. The climax had been reached. Within a few hours of Gagan Singh's murder, the sovereign queen ordered the chiefs to assemble in the courtyard of the military headquarters (kot) to trace the assassin of her paramour. The attempts to lay hands at those who connived at the murder resulted in mutual accusations. In the confusion that followed, a large number of civil and military chiefs were massacred.

On the morrow of the kot-massacre Jang Bahadur Rana became the prime minister.⁵⁸ He founded the Rana dynasty of prime ministers who ruled Nepal for one hundred and five years usurping the powers of the kings. Thus, the kot-massacre marked the beginning of an era of Nepalese history in which the kingship fell "in abeyance."

Rise of Jang Bahadur Rana

It would not be out of place to study briefly the origin of the Ranas and the rise of the first Rana Prime Minister.

The Ranas claim to have descended from the Rajputs of Udaipur and had some books and genealogies written to support this claim.⁵⁹ But some eminent Nepalese historians reject this claim as pretensions made by the Ranas only to elevate their rank⁶⁰ in order to justify

⁵⁷Oldfield, n. 51, 356.

⁵⁸Jang Bahadur was the first head of government to be called Prime Minister.

⁵⁹See P.J.B. Rana, n. 52, 1; Major Phalendra Bikram Rana, *Nepali Rana-Gharana-ko Samkshipta Vamsavali* (2014 V.S.) 1 (Nepali); Ramlal, *Nepalastha Surya-Vamsi Sisodiya Rana ki Vamsavali arthat Sri Tin Maharaja Jangabahadur ke Gharana ka* (Nepal, 1879) (Hindi); and Wright, n. 4, 174-6.

⁶⁰This view of the Nepalese historians is affirmed by the eminent social anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf who believes that the Chhetri clan of Kunwars from which the Rana family has descended is lower than the Thakuris (to which the Shahs and some other noble families belong). See Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, "Caste in Multi-Ethnic Society of Nepal," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (Paris), 4 (April 1960) 19-20.

and facilitate the exercise of despotic powers which they came to possess in the nineteenth century. Whatever be the validity of their claim, it is clear that the Rana family had an established historical position at the time of Jang Bahadur's rise to power.

Jang's Heritage

The ancestors of Jang Bahadur from the time of his great grandfather to his own always remained in the forefront of the political life of the country and worked in close collaboration with the Gurkha kings. Jang Bahadur's great grandfather, Ram Krishna Kunwar, entered Prithvi Narayan Shah's service as a *sardar* in the Gurkha army in 1743.⁶¹ He played an eminent part in the important Gurkha expeditions which conquered Nuwakot and Kirtipur, defeated the East India Company's forces under Captain Kinloch and subjugated Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon. He was also actively associated with the subsequent conquests in the east of the valley. Similarly, Jang Bahadur's grandfather, Ranjit Kunwar, played a notable role in the expansion and consolidation of Nepal. For his loyal services to the king, he was made one of the four principal *kajis* of the state.⁶² In addition to other expeditions, he played a heroic role⁶³ in the Sino-Nepalese War of 1791-92.

Jang Bahadur's father, Bal Narsingh Kunwar, kept up the ancestral tradition of loyalty to the Gurkha throne and rendered distinguished services to the kingdom. As a reward for capturing and strangulating to death the assassin of King Ran Bahadur Shah, he was appointed a *kaji*. This position was to be hereditary in his family.⁶⁴ Thus, Jang Bahadur started his career with a proud heritage.

His Career

Jang Bahadur did not have much education except for a smattering of Sanskrit which he was taught at home. Since his childhood, he was much interested in sports, wrestling and arts of warfare

⁶¹M.P.B. Rana, n. 59, 7.

⁶²P.J.B. Rana, n. 52, 6.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

such as fencing and archery. In the very choice of sports, he had revealed the mettle of a warrior. Gradually, he received regular training in wielding weapons and practised musketry. He joined military service for the first time at the age of about sixteen, in 1832-33. By that time, he had acquired some acquaintance with the modes of administration as a result of his stay with his father who served as governor in various districts.

In 1837, when the fortunes of Bhim Sen Thapa began to decline, Jang Bahadur and his father because of their being related⁶⁵ to Thapa were deprived of their jobs and of their property. He wandered in vain for a couple of years in India and Nepal in search of some source of income. In the meantime, however, he had made himself known as a tough and gallant young man capable of performing hazardous physical feats.⁶⁶ In recognition of his fighting skill and intelligence, the king made him a captain in the artillery in February 1840. In November 1841, he was asked by the king to join his bodyguard. Two months later, he was employed as a *kaji* in *kumarichoke* (Office of the Auditor and Accountant). This was his first and incidentally the last subordinate civil appointment.

Jang Bahadur by now had given sufficient evidence of his potentialities. Sir Henry Lawrence, the then British Resident in Kathmandu, had already described him as a man of "exceptional intelligence" with "dominating personality."⁶⁷ Conscious of his own capacity and strength, Jang Bahadur had been keenly watching the ebb and flow of Nepalese politics ever since the fall of Bhim Sen Thapa. Mathabar Singh Thapa's appointment as *mukhtiyar* enabled him to rise to an influential position and participate in high councils of the state. But he was not satisfied with the way power was being wielded by those at the helm. He often exhorted Mathabar Singh to exercise his powers as *mukhtiyar* more effectively and not to be subservient to the wild and imbecile proclivities of royal personages. Once in his capacity as a member of the State Council,

⁶⁵Jang Bahadur's mother was the daughter of Nain Singh, a brother of Bhim Sen Thapa. Jang was thus a maternal grandson of Bhim Sen Thapa.

⁶⁶He had demonstrated his courage and skill in tackling wild animals, rescuing people from calamities, and in satiating the wild and capricious desires of Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram Shah who took delight in seeing a man on horseback jump from a bridge into a river, or a man jump into a deep well, etc.

⁶⁷Perceval London, *Nepal* (London, 1928) I, 109.

he demanded investigation into the request made by some tenants for remission of revenues. But the request was arbitrarily rejected.⁶⁸ Mathabar Singh felt uncomfortable at the interference in his administration by "a mere stripling." He got Jang Bahadur removed from the State Council and put him on the staff of the heir-apparent.

At the Helm of Politics

This and other events made Jang Bahadur fully conversant with the undercurrents of the court politics. This also divested him of any regard that he had for Mathabar Singh. He became evermore cautious and careful. Being in the thick of politics, he started planning his way to rise higher and higher. He is alleged to have been used as a handy instrument in the conspiracy against the life of Mathabar Singh.

In the political arrangement which was contrived at after the death of Mathabar Singh, Jang Bahadur was one of the four topmost persons in the kingdom. As stated earlier, he had been ranked fourth in the coalition ministry headed by Fateh Jang Chautaria. He was given the command of three regiments. His political sagacity and physical valour, strengthened by the three regiments under his command, made him a person to be reckoned with in the politics of Nepal. He keenly observed the growing power of Gagan Singh—queen's paramour—who ranked second in the ministry and was the commander of seven regiments. He thoroughly sensed the queen's ambition too. Carefully moulding his conduct according to political exigencies, he professed sincere loyalty to the queen and Gagan Singh. He flattered both of them by claiming to be their chief supporter. His brothers and cousins had lately been made captains and lieutenants in his regiments.

Road to Premiership

As mentioned earlier, the murder of Gagan Singh touched off a serious political crisis in Nepal. The fateful hour for Jang Bahadur arrived when the sovereign queen ordered the civil and military chiefs to assemble at the military headquarters on the night of 14

⁶⁸P.J.B. Rana, n. 52, 44.

September 1846 to find out the assassin of Gagan Singh.

As soon as the bugles were sounded, General Jang Bahadur with his brothers and his three regiments arrived at the kot. Immediately he went to the aggrieved queen and expressed his fears about his own security, because, next to Gagan Singh, he claimed to be her special servant. He also warned her that ultimately she herself and her two sons might suffer. He made her conscious of the sovereign powers given to her in January 1843, and advised her to make a thorough inquiry into the case and take severe action against those proved guilty.⁶⁹ Then Jang Bahadur went out and alerted his three regiments. Meanwhile, the king had also been called to the scene. All officers of the state, mostly unarmed, had already gathered at the kot except Fateh Jang Chautaria, the head of the coalition ministry. The queen suspected Kaji Bir Kishore Pande of being at least an accomplice to the murder of Gagan Singh. She ordered General Abhiman Singh to arrest him. Though Bir Kishore pleaded not guilty, the enraged queen asked General Abhiman Singh to behead him. Abhiman Singh referred the matter to the king. The king knew who the real culprit was and, therefore, did not approve of the execution. Consequently, the general refused to obey the queen. The queen at once sent for Jang Bahadur and ordered that the deliberations of the council be started immediately without waiting for Fateh Jang Chautaria. The king, however, was finding an excuse for postponing the stormy discussion and advised that the meeting should not be held in the absence of Fateh Jang. The king rode off to Fateh Jang's house and after sending him to the kot proceeded to the British Residency. When Fateh Jang Chautaria and his party reached the kot, they were met by Jang Bahadur who was now acting on behalf of the queen. He related to the Chautarias all that had happened including how Abhiman Singh had disobeyed the queen's order to execute Bir Kishore Pande. Jang Bahadur told Fateh Jang that the only means of appeasing the infuriated queen and to settle the matter peacefully was "to make away with both these persons [Bir Kishore Pande and Abhiman Singh] which course, with your approval, I will effect; and then you may administer the affairs of the revenue and territorial ... whilst I remain in my post of Junghee General (commander of the

⁶⁹Oldfield, n. 51, 357.

forces) and act under your orders.”⁷⁰

Fateh Jang Chautaria refused to be a party to this plan. He said that Bir Kishore Pande should be given fair trial. He endorsed the action of Abhiman Singh. Fateh Jang told Abhiman Singh what Jang had just proposed. Abhiman immediately sent for his three regiments and alerted them. Jang Bahadur on his way to the queen's apartment saw Abhiman's men loading the muskets. He reported this to the queen. She with sword in hand immediately came down to the place where Fateh Jang, Abhiman Singh, Dalbanjan Pande and other chiefs including some of Jang's brothers had assembled. Addressing them all, she asked, “who has killed my faithful General Gagan Singh? Name him quickly.” There was no answer. However, Fateh Jang promised a thorough investigation. The infuriated queen tried to kill Bir Kishore Pande who was in chains. But the three chiefs checked her and pacified her. They followed her from the hall towards the upper storey. No sooner had the queen reached the upper storey than shots were heard within the building. Fateh Jang Chautaria and Dalbanjan Pande fell dead. Abhiman Singh who was wounded staggered back and shouted, “This is Jang's treachery.” He tried to get out and join his regiments but was cut into two by Krishan Bahadur, one of the younger brothers of Jang Bahadur.

This precipitated a crisis. Kharak Bikram Shah, the son of Fateh Jang, who had seen his father being shot and Abhiman Singh being cut down rushed with *khukari* at the brothers of Jang Bahadur and inflicted a gash across the heads of Bam Bahadur and Krishan Bahadur. As he was about to deliver the second blow (which might have proved fatal) on Bam Bahadur, Jang Bahadur came to the rescue of his brother and shot Kharak Bikram dead. The whole congregation was now almost divided between Jang Bahadur and his supporters on the one side and all the rest on the other.⁷¹ In the meantime, Jang's regiments had entered the quadrangle. All

⁷⁰Major C. Thoresby, Resident, to H.M. Elliott, Officiating Secretary, Government of India, dated 18 March 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (27 March 1847) 113. NAI.

⁷¹Sylvain Levi describes the situation thus: “In the darkness of the hall and the corridors, dimly lighted by the flickering light of night lamps, a murderous duel takes place blindly between the partisans of Jang rallied round him and his adversaries; they hit, they throttle, they massacre without knowing the victims. Outside the regiments of Jang guard the exits; their knives slay mercilessly the enemies or those held in suspicion who hope to find safety in flight.” See Levi, n. 52, II, 334.

those who were not friendly to Jang were soon massacred. Most of the members of the congregation being unarmed, it was easy for Jang and his regiments to win. It was more a slaughter than a fight. A large number⁷² of officers and high-ranking chiefs either fled or were murdered. Jang Bahadur and his brothers were the only survivors of note. Before the massacre was over in the early hours of the morning of 15 September 1846,⁷³ the queen appointed Jang Bahadur as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief and he presented to her his *nazar* of acknowledgement.

Who Conspired at the Massacre ?

The massacre served Jang Bahadur well. But whether he or anyone else conspired at it or it just happened is still a controversial question. According to a section of the Nepalese scholars, the massacre was the result of a British conspiracy to get rid of all anti-British elements in Nepal and to secure power for Jang Bahadur who was a stooge of the British. But there is no evidence to support this view. Nor is there much evidence to believe that the massacre was pre-planned⁷⁴ in its entirety.

⁷²Hemraj's *Vamsavali* gives the list of sufferers as a result of the kot-massacre as follows: murdered in the massacre including General Gagan Singh—31 (including 3 *chautarias*, 2 generals, 7 *kajis*, 6 *sardars*, 2 captains); fled from Kathmandu—26; degraded from caste—2; turned out from Nepal—26. See Guruiyu Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalaya, Kathmandu).

⁷³The date of conferment of prime ministership on Jang Bahadur as given in Hemraj's *Vamsavali* and as told by Babu Ram Acharya on the basis of Subba Buddhiman Singh's *Vamsavali* is Samvat 1903, *Ashwin Badi* 11, which corresponds to 15 September 1846. This agrees also with the account that the prime ministership was conferred before the massacre (which started at night on 14 September and continued till the early hours of 15 September) ended. See Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, ne. 72. According to some accounts, however, the prime ministership was conferred on 16 September 1846. Jang Bahadur by virtue of being the commander-in-chief had henceforth full control over all the 16 regiments of Nepalese army.

⁷⁴Ex-King Rajendra Bikram Shah on the occasion of the conferment of maharajaship of Kaski and Lamjung on Jang Bahadur in August 1856 made a statement that the kot-massacre was a "pre-meditated affair, and planned and carried out under written instructions sent from time to time by himself to Jang Bahadur." But it is difficult to accept this statement made so long after the event and in a context in which the ex-king wanted to show how obedient and faithful Jang Bahadur had been to him in the past. For the statement, see Major G. Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 6 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 55, para 5. NAI.

Technically, perhaps, if any one can be held responsible for the massacre, it was the queen. She made use of the sovereign powers vested in her to call the assembly, to enquire about the assassin of Gagan Singh, to order the arrest and execution of Bir Kishore Pande, and attempted to behead him with her own sword.

However, a careful study of the manner in which the massacre was "conducted" and the role which Jang Bahadur played in it suggests that he had a hand in it.⁷⁵ The presence of his regiments at the kot and the deployment of his soldiers at strategic points, his successful attempt to get into the confidence of the queen, his sinister proposal to Fateh Jang Chautaria about Bir Kishore Pande and Abhiman Singh, the hasty action of his brother in killing Abhiman Singh, the following action which precipitated a fight in which, as luck would have it, only Jang's enemies were killed, and finally the fact that this gruesome occurrence was climaxed by the royal declaration appointing Jang as the prime minister—all these are suggestive of the fact that the massacre was not just accidental and not merely the consequence of the temper of an enraged queen.

In the history of Nepal, the kot-massacre of 1846 was an important event which marked the beginning of the Rana rule. But the Rana rule was not the direct outcome of the kot-massacre, nor was it the result of the role played by Jang Bahadur alone. It was in reality the result of the interplay of political forces which had been operating since the time of Ran Bahadur Shah.

⁷⁵This suggestion is further strengthened if the allegation that Jang Bahadur himself shot Gagan Singh is correct. For the allegation, see Balchandra Sharma, *Nepal-ko Atihasik Rup Rekha* (Banaras, 2008 V.S.) 300 (Nepali).

King under the Ranas

Historical Background

NEPAL HAS a long tradition of monarchical form of government. The monarchs in ancient Nepal like those in India¹ did not possess absolute powers. The Licchavi kings who were among the earliest of Nepal's rulers were recognised by the feudal chiefs as *primus inter pares*² only. Amsuvarman, the founder of the Thakuri dynasty which succeeded the Licchavis, was like a chief among the various chieftains as his title *maha-samant*^{2a} literally meant. He even looked to his subjects as a source of strength and support.³

In medieval times the powers of the monarch, though theoretically absolute, were in practice curtailed by the landed aristocracy who in times of disorder took law into their own hands and made and unmade kings at their will.⁴

However, the Gurkha conquest upset this tradition because the new monarchs were not prepared to share their authority with any one and zealously safeguarded it. They conquered and united

¹K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity* (Bangalore, 1955) 339-41; and Narendra Nath Law, *Aspect of Ancient Indian Polity* (Oxford 1921) 11.

²Sylvain Levi, *Nepal*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1905-08) (English translation from the original French, in typescript, in the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi) I, 358. Writing about the Licchavi kings, Levi says: "The King bears the still modest title of 'Bhattaraka Maharaja,' 'King Sovereign.' He is surrounded by turbulent and refractory barons (samantas) who only agree to recognize him as 'primus inter pares' and who profit by each favourable opportunity to refuse him homage."

^{2a}*Ibid.*

³D.R. Regmi, *Ancient Nepal* (Calcutta, 1960) 183.

⁴Luciano Petech, *Medieval History of Nepal* (Rome, 1958) 173-4. According to Petech, in medieval times the Nepalese monarchy was by divine right. The king reigned by the favour of Pasupati; but after Jaya-Sthiti Malla, although Pasupati retained the first place, the king is expressly said to rule by the favour of Manesvari.

the various principalities and made the central government stronger.⁵

Prithvi Narayan Shah instituted the hereditary kingship of the type that prevailed in his home state of Gorkha. The king had the title of *maharajadhiraj*, Great Sovereign, i.e. king over kings, and possessed absolute powers.⁶ He was assisted in the exercise of his powers by *thar-ghars*,⁷ chiefs of some selected castes who held charge of the principal offices of the state. According to Sylvain Levi, the *thar-ghars* traditionally had "a right of remonstrance"⁸ against the king.

Though with the passage of time the importance of *thar-ghars* as the chief assistants of the king waned, the institution of *thar-ghars* seems to have existed at least up to 1850.⁹ In course of time they were reduced to the position of senior members of the *bharadar* (literally, bearer of the burden of the state) which was a large council

⁵Levi, n. 2, 364.

⁶*Ibid.*, 365.

⁷*Thar-ghars*, literally meaning families belonging to different castes (*thar*: caste; *ghar*: family), originally referred to those six chiefs of different castes who assisted Dravya Shah in the conquest of Gorkha. Dravya Shah, therefore, distributed the principal offices of the state among them as follows: (i) Narayan Das Arjyal—Guru; (ii) Sarveshwar Khanal—Purohit; (iii) Ganesh Pande—Minister; (iv) Bhagirath Panth—Senapati (Commander-in-Chief); (v) Ganga Ram Rana—Justice; (vi) Keshava Vohara—Revenue.

Data about the names of the *thar-ghars* and their portfolios were provided by Chittaranjan Nepali, Kathmandu. The names agree with those given by Yogi Narharinath and Babu Ram Acharya, eds., *Prithvi Narayan Sah Dev ko Divya Updes* (Kathmandu, 2010 V.S.) 32 (Nepali). The system of *thar-ghars* introduced by Dravya Shah was continued by Prithvi Narayan Shah in Nepal also.

⁸Levi, n. 2, 365. According to Levi, there were thirty six chiefs of clans who were called *thar-ghars*. They formed a hierarchy with three different stages, the highest group in dignity comprising six families, who received due to their number the name of *Chattrra*.

⁹In the *Nyamati Darta Phant* of Kamyandari Kitap Khana, Kathmandu, the registers up to the year 1907 V.S. (A.D. 1850) mention the names of *thar-ghars* as part of the *bharadar*. But the register of 1908 V.S. and the subsequent ones do not refer to the *thar-ghars*. This can be interpreted to mean the discontinuation of the appointment of *thar-ghars* in 1908 V.S.

The *thar-ghars* mentioned in the register of 1905 V.S. are : Bhagirath Pande, Jayadev Panth, Khadg Vilas Arjyal, Priya Vart Khanal, Pratiman Rana and Ran Val Vohara. This means that the castes of the *thar-ghars* remained unchanged up to the end.

of courtiers performing advisory and executive functions.

According to a Nepalese historian, Ran Bahadur Shah instituted a Council of Four Kajis as a body superseding the *thar-ghars*. He was constrained to do so presumably because of his differences with his courtiers about his policies regarding religious matters and their resentment at his marriage with a Brahman girl. The "Four Kajis" were selected from the castes of Basniat, Pande, Newar and Gurung. They were supposed to act as a sort of cabinet collectively carrying out the civil and military administration of the country, unlike the *thar-ghars* who were not more than individual assistants to the king. This change may be considered to have implied some devolution of the powers of the king.

Further, in addition to the Council of Four Kajis, Ran Bahadur appointed a *mukhya chautaria*, a *chautaria* and a *kaji*. The powers of the *mukhya chautaria* were equivalent to those of a chief minister, and he was usually a royal collateral.¹⁰ The additional *kaji* dealt with Nepal's relations with China and Tibet.

On his return from exile in Banaras in 1804, Ran Bahadur Shah made further changes in the constitution of the council. He became the *mukhtiyar* and took over the functions of the chief minister and the regent to his minor son, King Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah. The role of the *chautarias* and the "Four Kajis" as understood formerly changed. They became part of a larger council, the *bharadar*, whose members were supposed to perform specific functions under the direction of the king.

The *bharadar* included¹¹ one *chautaria*, four *kajis*, four *sardars*, two *khardars*, one *kapardar* and one *khazanchi*. The *chautaria*, though

¹⁰The office of *chautaria* existed in Malla times [see Dhanvakra Vajracharya, *Itihas-Samsodhan* (Kathmandu, 2014 V.S.) serial no. 40, 10], and also in the state of Gorkha before 1769. According to a Nepalese historian, this office was continued by Prithvi Narayan Shah at Kathmandu also, though we do not find a reference to it in the published accounts of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Presumably the *chautaria*, who was usually a royal collateral, functioned actively only when the king himself was disabled or absent from the seat of government, i.e. more or less as a regent. References to this office, however, are found in later accounts by Kirkpatrick and Hamilton.

¹¹Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (London, 1811) 197-201; Francis Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Edinburgh, 1819) 107-9; Levi, n. 2, 368-9.

not necessarily performing the functions or having the authority of a chief minister, was considered equivalent to a chief minister because of his position as the nearest relation to the king. The *kajis* and the *sardars* generally performed the civil and military functions respectively. The *khardars* were like office superintendents. The *kapardar* was the minister of the king's household. The *khazanchi* was the treasurer. The members of the *bharadar* functioned as "an immediate emanation of the royal authority"¹² and attended on the king in the royal darbar.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the influence of the kings started waning because of their continuous minority and imbecility. Consequently, the ministers or the *mukhtiyars* came to wield the real power. Strong ministers like Damodar Pande and Bhim Sen Thapa tended to overshadow the king and ruled almost independently. The *bharadars* began to function as councillors more of the minister than of the king. At times, the minister could afford to ignore even the *bharadar's* advice.¹³ The *bharadar*, on such occasions, was reduced to the position of an agency to countersign the laws or orders issued by the king at the instance of the minister.

Thus, the gradual decline of the king's authority ran parallel to the disappearance of the *bharadar* as an effective body.¹⁴ The authority of the king in council, as traditionally understood, tended to be replaced by the authority of the individual minister and his henchmen. This trend got crystallised into a definite pattern when Ranas rose to power. The Rana Prime Minister ruled the country despotically as also over the king. The king was relegated to the background as a mere shadow of his former self, though formally he remained the supreme ruler of the state and the 'source of all law.

¹²Levi, n. 2, 368.

¹³Bhim Sen Thapa decided in favour of the 1814-16 war with the British in spite of the opposition of the *bharadar*. See Chittaranjan Nepali, *Bhim Sen Thapa ra Tatakalin Nepal* (Kathmandu, 2013 V.S.) 111-2 and 117 (Nepali).

¹⁴Writing about the *bharadar* at the end of the 19th century, Sylvain Levi says: "The organization of the *bharadar* has disappeared since a long time. The powers, successively conferred on Damodar Pande, on Bhim Sen, on Jung Bahadur, have made a dictator of the Prime Minister. From one panjani to another, he is the absolute chief." Levi, n. 2, 369.

The Rana Period

The objectives of the Rana Prime Minister were, first, to acquire the real power by making the king politically ineffective and, secondly, if possible, to usurp the throne for himself. By a series of clever strokes of diplomacy, political manoeuvres and military pressure, Jang Bahadur, after the kot-massacre, ultimately succeeded in realising his first objective with the result that people regarded the king more as a religious than as a political head. As regards the second objective, he made several futile attempts to capture the throne and succeeded only in securing the title of *maharaja* and the sovereignty of the two provinces of Kaski and Lamjung in 1856.

Thus, a new pattern of relationship between the king and the prime minister got institutionalised during the rule of Jang Bahadur. In other words, the sovereignty of Nepal which hitherto vested in the king only was henceforth to be shared by the prime minister. The new position of the king has been summed up by Sylvain Levi in the following words:

In fact the King is only a sort of entity today, a nominal fiction, the only representative of the country recognised by the foreign powers. His red seal [*lal mohar*] is necessary to give an official value to diplomatic documents, but his action is void.¹⁵

Queen's Discontent

The emergence of Jang Bahadur from the kot-massacre as a powerful man represented the defeat not only of King Rajendra Bikram and Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram but also of the nobility. The king was utterly helpless and, therefore, felt humiliated at the murder of many of his trusted chieftains and the collateral *chautarias*. The heir-apparent had been a horrified spectator of the ghastly massacre which he had been deliberately made to see. The queen, legally vested with sovereign power, was the only royal personage who was optimistic about the consequences of the kot-massacre. She expected that Jang Bahadur would get the throne to her son in deprivation of the rights of Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram, son of the late senior queen.

¹⁵Levi, n. 2, 367.

After the acquisition of prime ministership on the morrow of the kot-massacre, Jang Bahadur's immediate concern was how to consolidate his new position and make it secure not only against any danger from other chiefs, but also against any possible encroachment by the queen. He was shrewd enough not to depend too much on the support of the queen, a member of that whimsical royal family which had permitted the occurrence of many an unwarranted storm in the politics of Nepal. In order to realise his objective, the very first step that he took was to get his brothers and other supporters appointed to important civil and military offices¹⁶ of the kingdom. By now he had already acquired a nearly complete hold over the military.¹⁷

The political power in Nepal at this time was precariously poised between the queen and the prime minister,¹⁸ the former holding it *de jure* and the latter *de facto*. This often resulted in uneasy situations in which the queen and the prime minister tended to come into conflict with each other. Jang Bahadur for quite some time tried to avoid an open conflict with the queen but could not do so on the issue of illegitimate enthronement of her son. The queen desired Jang Bahadur to put the heir-apparent and his brother to death and place on the throne her own son. Jang refused to fulfil the queen's desire and furnished the following reasons: first, that it was "in contravention of all practice, and is directly in opposition to all laws, human and divine;" and, secondly, that it would mean "the commission of a most heinous crime in defiance of conscience and religion."¹⁹ He wrote to the queen: "Over and above my duty to you as Regent, I owe another duty to the state, which in case of conflict must override any personal considerations. My duty to the state bids me to submit that, should Your Majesty ever repeat this order, you shall be prosecuted for attempt at murder by the law of the land."²⁰

This challenged the queen's authority. She brooked no delay

¹⁶For details of these appointments, see Chapter 4, n. 15.

¹⁷Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, *Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal* (Abhaycharan Mukerji, ed., Allahabad, 1909) 83.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰*Ibid.*

in avenging this disobedience and called Bir Dhvaj Basniat to conspire against the life of Jang Bahadur. She promised to give him the premiership if the conspiracy went through. But Jang Bahadur, who came to know of the conspiracy before it could mature, overpowered the conspirators and either murdered or arrested them.²¹ Some twentythree men were killed. A special body of soldiers was deputed to watch the movements of the queen who, it was feared, would take to further hostile activities.

Banishment of the Queen and the King

After the Basniat conspiracy, Jang Bahadur mobilised all the political and military force at his command to get rid of the queen and her *de jure* powers. An extraordinary meeting of the *bharadar* (state council), which now consisted of his henchman, was called, not by a king or queen but by a minister, Jang Bahadur. The council, obviously at the instance of Jang, passed against the queen the strongest possible sentence "sanctioned by both the King and the Heir-Apparent."²² The queen was told: "Whereas by your recent conduct you have exceeded the powers vested in you by the Royal Proclamation of the 5th of January 1843, the sovereign authority vested in you by the said Proclamation is hereby withdrawn."²³ The conduct that had provided justification for such a sentence was, first, that the queen had attempted to get the prime minister murdered as a first step towards the murder of Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram in order to put her own son on the throne and, secondly, that she had caused the death of hundreds of people and brought misery and ruin upon her subjects whose misfortunes would not end so long as she was in the country. She was ordered to make immediate preparation for departure to Banaras.

²¹The murder of Bir Dhvaj Basniat and his collaborators is commonly known as the Bhandarkhal Massacre, because of the Bhandarkhal palace where the scene occurred. For details of the conspiracy and the massacre, see *ibid.*, 84-8; and H.A. Oldfield, *Sketches from Nepal* (London, 1880) I, 369-71. Babu Ram Acharya, the eminent Nepalese historian, commenting on the Bhandarkhal Massacre told the writer that Jang Bahadur wanted to get rid of the Basniats as the favourites of the queen, and did so on the plea of a conspiracy against him. Orders to that effect had been obtained by him from King Rajendra Bikram some days in advance.

²²P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 88.

²³*Ibid.*

The two sons of the queen insisted on accompanying their mother to exile. But more surprising was the announcement of a sudden decision of the king to accompany the queen. He said: "I am painfully conscious of the many murders that I have been the means of committing, of the widespread misery I have caused to my people. . . . I propose therefore to take a pilgrimage to Banaras, where by bathing in the Ganges and by performing other penance, I hope to expiate my sins."²⁴ Apparently, the decision was the king's own, but actually it seems to have been taken at the instance of Jang Bahadur, for he "strictly warned him [the king] not to join any more in the Queen's intrigues."²⁵ In the absence of the queen, who left for Banaras on 23 Novmeber 1846, Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram acted as regent.

Surendra Bikram Occupies Throne

Within a few months of his arrival at Banaras, King Rajendra Bikram started conspiratorial activities against the life of Jang Bahadur. A letter²⁶ bearing the "red seal" and signatures of Rajendra Bikram Shah ordering the troops at Kathmandu to murder Jang Bahadur and his brothers was intercepted by Jang's agents. Jang Bahadur brought that letter to the notice of the troops and in their presence made a declaration effecting the dethronement of King Rajendra Bikram Shah and the enthronement of Surendra Bikram Shah as the rightful sovereign of Nepal on 12 May 1847.²⁷

The position of the monarch was now clear. The throne was occupied by Surendra Bikram Shah who, though he had attained majority, was a mere puppet²⁸ of Jang Bahadur. The monarch

²⁴*Ibid.*, 89.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶For text of the letter, see *Foreign Secret Consultation* (26 June 1847) 193. NAI.

²⁷P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 94. For loss of faith of the soldiery and the nobility in King Rajendra Bikram, and their acquiescence in Jang Bahadur's declaration of his dethronement, see: (i) abstract translation of the representation made by 370 civil and military chiefs of Nepal to His Highness Maharaja Rajendra Bikram Shah, dated 12 May 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (26 June 1847) 194, NAI; and (ii) substance of the reply given by the civil and military officers to the *Lal-Mohar* of Maharaja Rajendra Bikram Shah, dated 17 June 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (31 July 1847) 195. NAI. These documents also show the complete hold of Jang Bahadur over the soldiery and the nobility of Nepal.

had lost his powers to such an extent that the state council which formerly advised the monarch now advised the prime minister. The monarch, instead of commanding the prime minister, was now being commanded by the prime minister. In this connection, the following are the views of the Governor-General of India which were conveyed to the British Resident at Kathmandu.

... the Prince [King Surendra Bikram Shah] is at this moment in the power of the Minister Jang Bahadur: that individual has obtained power by means the most revolting to humanity; in point of fact it is the terror of his sanguinary proceedings which is the cause of the ex-Maharajah not daring to return to his own capital. Without doubt much is to be attributed to the Maharajah's own weakness of character.²⁹

Jang Bahadur had no doubt managed to have on the throne a puppet king. But he did not consider his success complete unless the issue was settled with ex-King Rajendra Bikram Shah. In 1847 the ex-king returned to Nepal and relinquished his claim to the throne. The British Resident reported this event in the these words: "He has publicly declared his acquiescence to the accession of his son, styling him the Maharaja and saying that when he has occasion to write agreeably to custom, he shall place his [Surendra's] name above his own, and use the Kesuree or Yellow, in lieu of the Lal³⁰

²⁸Heir-Apparent Surendra Bikram in his younger days had seen Jang Bahadur performing miraculous feats of physical valour. He had been a witness to the rise of Jang Bahadur through the horrors of the kot-massacre and the Bhandarkhal massacre. He knew how Jang Bahadur had defied the queen and exiled her and the king to save the throne for him. He knew also Jang's hold over the soldiery and the nobility. He, therefore, could not afford to be more than a puppet of Jang Bahadur.

²⁹H.M. Elliot, Secretary, Government of India, to the Resident, dated 24 July 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (31 July 1847) 204. NAI.

³⁰*Lal-mohar*, i.e. red seal, is usually borne by the lawful sovereign of Nepal. The ex-king indicated his relinquishment of sovereignty by agreeing to abandon *lal-mohar*, and use instead, if occasion arose, the *kesuree* (or yellow) *mohar*. An evidence of the fact that he stuck to this declaration is the first *ain* (law code) promulgated by Jang Bahadur in 1910 V.S. (corresponding to A.D. 1854), which bears the red seals of King Surendra Bikram Shah and Heir-Apparent Trailokya Bikram Shah and the yellow seal of ex-King Rajendra Bikram Shah.

Mohur.”³¹

There was one more issue with which Jang Bahadur was keenly concerned. He wanted to be publicly exonerated of the charges which he thought were levelled against him by the ex-king during his exile in Banaras. It seems that Jang exercised some pressure on the ex-king who finally made the following statement in a letter to the Governor-General of India on 15 August 1847: “I [was] escorted here with comfort and respect ... and I trust you will pay no attention to my former Khureetas as they are full of false statement. From the manner I was treated on the road to this I was so pleased that I presented the Minister [Jang Bahadur] with a Khillut.”³²

The power and prestige of the prime minister increased to such an extent that the monarchy was paralysed. Every increase in the powers of the prime minister was at the cost of the powers of the king. With a view to enhancing his prestige abroad, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur visited England³³ and other European countries during 1850-51. He visited these countries as ambassador of the king of Nepal, but the pomp and glamour with which he went around and the receptions which were accorded to him were not less than those befitting a royal dignitary. He returned to Kathmandu in February 1851 and successfully dealt with a conspiracy against his life in which two of his own younger brothers were involved.³⁴ His position in the kingdom was further strengthened.

King's Discomfiture

King Surendra Bikram was throughout a meek witness to the increasing hold of the prime minister on the body-politic of Nepal. More galling to him was the strict control which the prime minister exercised on his personal life to ensure that he did not get involved

³¹Major C. Thoresby, Resident, to H.M. Elliot, Secretary, Government of India, dated 9 August 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (25 September 1847) 170. NAI.

³²Abstract translation of a Khureeta from the ex-Maharaja of Nepal to the Rt. Hon'ble the Governor-General, dated 15 August 1847, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (25 September 1847) 173. NAI.

³³For Jang's visit to England, see P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 113-52; and Kamal Dixit, ed., *Jang Bahadur-ke Belait Yatra* (Kathmandu, 2014 V.S.) (Nepali).

³⁴For the conspiracy, see P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 155-62.

in any conspiracy. In July 1851, the king suddenly announced his intention to abdicate the throne in favour of his infant son who was then hardly four-year old. This was extremely intriguing but the king gave no other reason for this except that he was overwhelmed with sorrow at the death of his eldest queen. Obviously this was a pretence, because the death had occurred nine months earlier. The real cause, as explained by Jang Bahadur's biographer, was that the king "had grown tired of playing the puppet; and living under strict surveillance, like an habitual convict, with no liberty to go about except when attended by a strong guard. These measures were imposed upon him by Jang Bahadur."³⁵ As this step on the part of the king would not have been in the interest of Jang, he prevailed upon the king, "partly by indirect inducements, but mostly by direct threats," to give up this idea.³⁶

Conferment of Maharajaship on Jang Bahadur

The weakness of the monarchy had become so obvious that Prime Minister Jang Bahadur had the boldness to make two attempts to capture the throne.³⁷ Having failed in both, he began to think of other means to wield sovereign powers over the whole or part of Nepal. He had already shown his martial skill and command over the soldiery by successfully leading the Nepalese army against the Tibetan forces in the Nepal-Tibet War of 1855-56.³⁸

Jang Bahadur surprised the whole kingdom by suddenly resigning on 1 August 1856. The reason given to the public was that he was too tired to bear any longer the severe strain of the heavy duties of his office. He desired that his brothers who had all through assisted him so loyally and capably in acquiring power and running the administration should carry on the government of the country. Accordingly, he recommended to the king that his first brother, Bam Bahadur, be appointed as the prime minister for life. The

³⁵*Ibid.*, 162.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Babu Ram Acharya, "Rana-shahi ra Shadayantra," *Sharada* (Kathmandu) 21, No. 5 (*Chaitra*, 2013 V.S.) 1 (Nepali).

³⁸For a detailed account of the Nepal-Tibet War, see P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 172-91; and Babu Ram Acharya, ed., "Nepal-Chin Yuddhasambandhi Samsamranpatra," *Nepal Sanskritik Parishad Patrika* (Kathmandu) 3, No. 3 (Nepali).

king had no choice but to accept his resignation and his recommendation. But the real reason of resignation has remained a matter of conjecture since then. One such conjecture was made by the British Resident Major Ramsay. While reporting Jang Bahadur's resignation to the Government of India, he said:

It may be possible that Jang Bahadur is indirectly aiming—not at sovereign power, for that he has long had—but at the Sovereign's position; and that he hopes through the acts of his brothers, and their numerous partisans, to be elevated, at no distant period, to the guddee.³⁹

This is perhaps indicative of the motives of this dramatic resignation. Only five days after the resignation—on 6 August 1856—King Surendra Bikram had to confer on Jang Bahadur the title of maharaja and the sovereignty of the two provinces of Kaski and Lamjung which yielded a revenue of rupees one lakh per annum. This title and the property were made hereditary. According to the powers now vested in Jang Bahadur, he could exercise his sovereign authority outside Kaski and Lamjung also, over the whole country between the Rivers Mahakali and Mechi,⁴⁰ and he could “coerce the King, should he mismanage the State affairs, internal or external.”⁴¹

Jang Bahadur resumed the prime ministership after the death of Bam Bahadur on 25 May 1857. Since then, the maharajaship of Kaski and Lamjung continued to be vested in the same person who held the prime ministership.

King Acted under Duress

The king had been forced to sign away his sovereign powers to Jang

³⁹Major G. Ramsay to G. F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 1 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 51, para 3. NAI.

⁴⁰P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 194. These sovereign powers included: (i) the right of life and death; (ii) the power of appointing and dismissing all servants of Government; (iii) the power of declaring war, concluding peace, and signing treaties with any foreign power, including the British, the Tibetans and Chinese; (iv) the power of inflicting punishment on the offenders; and (v) the power of making new laws and repealing old laws, civil criminal and military.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 194-5.

Bahadur who, possessed with the title of maharaja, gave the impression of being more or less a parallel king. Apparently, of course, Jang Bahadur said that the king had been pleased,⁴² for various reasons, to confer these favours on him, and that he accepted them with great reluctance under the king's pressure. It has been recorded by his son and biographer that the people also appealed to him to accept these privileges in lieu of the Crown which they had originally offered him.⁴³ In reality, however, the king had no choice but to accept what was dictated to him by Jang Bahadur.

Commenting on these occurrences, Resident Ramsay wrote:

... the occurrences of the past few days can hardly have taken place as they have been reported to me and I have detailed them—but they have resulted from much previous consideration, consultation and arrangement; the Maharaja, whose dread and whose dislike of Jang Bahadur and his party is about equally balanced having acted throughout merely as he was bid.⁴⁴

In another demi-official letter to the Government of India giving an elaborate analysis of the relations between the king and Jang Bahadur, Resident Ramsay wrote:

In my opinion, Jang Bahadur is too greedy, selfish, and ambitious to let matters rest as they now are. The King is a perfect non-entity, a mere tool in his hands, and being moreover almost an idiot, would be incapable of conducting the government of the country were he to attempt to do so. Jang Bahadur and his brothers, of whom he [king] is in great terror, and who often treat him with extreme rudeness, can persuade him to do anything they please, and can of course make it appear that all that is done emanates from himself—as in the case of the little Kingdom

⁴²Major Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 6 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 55, paras 3 and 5. NAI. See also translation of the *lal-mohar* conferring these honours on Jang Bahadur, in Appendix III.

⁴³ P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 193-4.

⁴⁴Ramsay to Edmonstone, n. 42, para 16.

and title to which Jang Bahadur has just *helped himself*, whilst making the people believe that they have been forced upon him by the Maharaja contrary to his own inclinations.

In the bazaars the saying is that the King is "Bukrec ka Maafik" [like a goat, i.e. weak], and that Jung Bahadur gave him his choice, either to confer upon him the title of a Maharaja, and a small separate Kingdom, or to take up his tulwar [sword], and prevent his [Jang Bahadur's] assuming the sovereignty of the whole country.⁴⁵

Thus the king had transferred complete *de jure* sovereignty over a part of Nepal and partial *de jure* sovereignty over the whole of Nepal to the prime minister. Besides, the king himself came under the *de facto* control of the prime minister.

Social and Political Life of the King

The legal basis of the curtailment of the king's powers having been secured on 6 August 1856, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur now proceeded with plans to reduce completely his social and political influence in the kingdom and to elevate simultaneously his own social position vis-a-vis the royal family and the nobility.

Control of King's Household

The king's personal life was strictly controlled by the Rana Prime Minister. He placed the royal household under the charge of his own selected agents who were asked to keep the prime minister informed of the king's daily routine and to organise his household in such a way that the king could do only what the prime minister wanted him to do. The movements of the king were restricted and regulated both inside and outside the palace. He was always supervised, whether at a state ceremonial, or a sport, or a mere stroll. Even members of the royal family except the personal family of the king could not see him without the permission of the prime

⁴⁵A demi-official from Resident G. Ramsay to G. F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 7 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultations* (29 August 1856) 55-7, pp. 25-31. NAI.

minister. The king thus became a "prisoner in the palace."⁴⁶ All communications in the name of the king were censored by the Foreign Ministry of the Rana government and only the absolutely harmless papers were permitted to reach the king.

These restrictions owed their origin to the violent manner in which the Rana Prime Minister had acquired power. They were imposed for the first time on the ex-King Rajendra Bikram Shah after his return from exile in August 1847 because he was suspected by Jang Bahadur of having conspired against his government. Pudma Jung Bahadur also refers to these restrictions in the following words:

... he was at all hours attended by trustworthy officers whom Jang Bahadur had placed with him to watch his movements and send daily reports of his doings. He was further prevented from seeing his own sons for some time, though afterwards this restriction was withdrawn. In every other respect, however, he was treated in a way befitting his royal birth, care being taken that his liberty did not extend to creating any disturbance in the country.⁴⁷

The number and the severity of restrictions on the king's life increased to suit the exacting requirements of Rana despotism. References to these restrictions have been made by British Resident G. Ramsay in 1863, while reporting the king's and Jang Bahadur's protest against an article in a paper, *Friend of India*, in which Jang Bahadur was accused of having sought British assistance in usurping the throne of Nepal as a reward for his services in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The Resident wrote:

⁴⁶We find reference to the strict restrictions on King Tribhuvan's personal life in Erika Leuchtag's account of her meetings with the king. See Erika Leuchtag, *With a King in the Clouds* (London, 1958) 116. What was true of King Tribhuvan was equally true of the kings before 1901. Another evidence of the restraints on the king's personal life is the limited personal expenditure that was permitted to the kings, as distinguished from the limitless allowances that were enjoyed by the Rana Prime Minister. For instance, in the *Nijamati Phant* of the *Kamyandari Kitab Khana*, Kathmandu, the register of the year 1915 V.S. (A.D. 1858) mentions the pocket expenditure of the then king as Rs. 4,800 annually, but there is no mention of the expenditure of Prime Minister Jang Bahadur. The allowances of other members junior in the Rana hierarchy are, however, mentioned, the highest of them being Rs. 4,200 annually for General Krishna Bahadur, C-in-C.

⁴⁷P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 98.

The King's position now is almost as constrained as it formerly was; his message to myself must, therefore, be regarded as instigated by the Minister: His Highness, who is *always* attended by one of Maharaja Jung Bahadur's brothers, or by some other Sirdar in the latter's confidence, could not have been informed of the matter published in the *Friend of India* without Jung Bahadur's permission. The only two copies of that paper received here for persons not belonging to the Residency are subscribed for by one of the Minister's own nephews, and by the Nepalese Officer who is his official channel of communication with myself; neither of these persons would dare to mention to the King any such circumstance; in fact, they could not obtain access to his person, except in the presence of the Sirdar on Maharaja Jung Bahadur's part, who never leaves his side, except when he goes into the inner apartments of his palace, to which none but the immediate members of his family have access.

Not only are no newspapers received here for the King, but all English letters to his address are delivered to Captain Kurbeer Khuttree, and those addressed in the vernacular are given to the Durbar Moonshee, in both cases for submission to the Minister; and the Post Master informs me that they are *always* sent back again to the Post Office in the course of a day or two, *unopened*, to be returned to the senders. His Highness, in fact, can do nothing without Maharaja Jung Bahadur's consent, and the Maharanees are equally powerless as himself. A marked improvement has, however, taken place in Jung Bahadur's personal demeanour towards His Highness. My predecessor reported that the King cowered in his Minister's presence, and I have seen Jung Bahadur very rude and over-bearing with him; but during the last few years, since their families became allied by marriage, Jung Bahadur has been outwardly most civil to him.⁴⁸

Upbringing of Crown Princes

The Ranas knew that imbecility of the kings had been mainly responsible for the political turmoils in Nepal prior to their advent.

⁴⁸Colonel G. Ramsay to Colonel H.M. Durand, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 14 July 1863, *Foreign Political A* (August 1863) 73, paras 10 and 11. NAI.

Therefore, they perpetuated this imbecility by introducing the crown princes to a life of licentiousness and debauchery. They kept them absolutely ignorant of their duties as the heads of state. According to the information supplied by an important Rana source, the royal palace was provided with a *nach-ghar*,⁴⁹ and the kings were allowed to keep five hundred maid servants. The king had of course the liberty to select the girls but their list remained with the prime minister. The foreigners who visited Nepal during the Rana rule were given an impression that the king was an indulgent and useless person whose incompetence had compelled the prime minister to take up large responsibilities. A characteristic account of the king's life under the Ranas was given by Hassoldt Davies. The account, though written near the end of the Rana rule, was true of the whole Rana period. He wrote:

The present puppet King lived in a palace hardly less sumptuous than his Prime Minister's. The fairest, the softest, the most artful girls of Nepal were chosen by the Ministerial cabinet to keep him contented ... the sweetest opium of Mongolia was brought to him in jars of jade and its use encouraged alike by the paramours and the family physician. He must be contented; he must be a good little boy and keep his fingers out of the Napalese jam-pot which should by rights be his. To this he had been enticed even before puberty with the dissipations which in his twenties left him vitiated of mind and body both.⁵⁰

Dispossession of the Kings

In order to isolate the king from the people and politics of the state, and to erase his image even as a temporal head, the Ranas advertised the king as a spiritual head only, a god Vishnu incarnate. This left the politics and administration of the country entirely in the hands of the Rana Prime Minister and his family. The king was invited to participate in governmental affairs only as a ceremonial head, e.g. to receive foreign envoys or to sign official orders or legislative enactments. This plight of kingship has been described by a writer in the following words:

⁴⁹The *nach-ghar* (theatre hall) was demolished by King Tribhuvan in 1934 on the pretext of his mother's death.

⁵⁰Hassoldt Davies, *Nepal, Land of Mystery* (London, 1943) 220-1.

To provide him [king] with a *raison d'être* and some facade of authority, Jang set the King at the head of the spiritual side of the State and saw to it that the venal Brahmins put it about that this feckless and degenerate monarch was the re-incarnation of Vishnu. Before long it became accepted that the King should not risk his holiness outside the capital, nor be absent from the palace for more than twelve hours. To say that the Prime Minister kept him prisoner in the palace may not be strictly true although doubtless they would not have allowed matters to be otherwise, having regard to the black records of so many of the ruthless chieftains who had been Kings and Princes of Nepal. Nevertheless, this very seclusion rendered the Kingship the more awe-inspiring and the more revered to its subjects.⁵¹

Matrimonial Alliances

A master stroke of craftsmanship with far-reaching political consequences was the scheme of Jang Bahadur to arrange marriages between the Rana family and the royal family and Chautarias.⁵² Personal life of the king and his family being controlled, the brides and bridegrooms for the royal children could not but be the choice of the prime minister. These matrimonial alliances served the Rana interests in many ways. First, they elevated the social status of the Ranas vis-a-vis the rest of the nobility and put them socially at par with the ruling dynasty, the Shahs. The Ranas, as already noted, belonged to a rather low stock. Secondly, they prevented the king from opposing the totalitarian designs of the Rana oligarchy and helped in patching up the old feud with the Chautarias. Thirdly, Rana daughters as royal wives were the best source of intelligence for the Ranas. Fourthly, it put on the throne, as we shall see, a lineal descendant of the Rana family.

On 8 May 1854, Jang Bahadur's eldest son, Jagat Jang, at the age of eight was married to the eldest daughter of King Surendra Bikram Shah, a girl of six years. The same summer, Jang Bahadur himself married the youngest sister of Fateh Jang Chautaria. These two

⁵¹Francis Tuker, *Gorkha The Story of the Gurkhas of Nepal* (London, 1957) 243.

⁵²Chautarias were the royal collaterals. The head of this clan, Fateh Jang Chautaria, who was the chief minister in the coalition ministry at the time of the kot-massacre, was murdered in the massacre. Ever since, the Chautarias and the Ranas were antagonistic to each other.

marriages are described by Pudma Jung Bahadur as

strokes of policy higher than had yet been practised by Jung Bahadur ... downright political treaties, that achieved ends otherwise unattainable; for no amount of political influence could have given that prestige to Jung Bahadur's position which was gained by this matrimonial alliance with royalty itself. No amount of penitence and pardon could have terminated the family feud between the Rana and Chautaria parties so amicably as was done by means of this loveless marriage.⁵³

On 24 February 1855, the second daughter of King Surendra Bikram Shah was married to Jang Bahadur's second son, Jit Jang. But a marriage more important than the earlier ones from the political point of view was that of two daughters of Jang Bahadur to Heir-Apparent Trailokya Bir Bikram Shah on 26 June 1857. The *lal-mohar* issued to Jang Bahadur by King Surendra Bikram Shah authorising this marriage stated: "As a consequence of this marriage, my son will be permitted to eat in the company of your daughter"; and that "the eldest son of your daughter will, according to the ancient traditions of the country, occupy the throne and rule over the country."⁵⁴ The first provision was intended to upgrade Jang Bahadur's caste to a level of the royal caste so that the two could intermix socially. But the real purpose as contained in the second provision was to have on the throne a lineal descendant of the Rana family. In this connection, the British Resident reported to his government on the occasion of the illness of King Surendra Bikram:

Of the Maharaj Adhiraj's two sons, the elder (Trailokya Bikram) died in 1878, leaving a son (Prithvi Bir Bikram), born on 8th August 1875. The mother of this child was a daughter of Jang Bahadur. The child has, since his father's death, been regarded as the heir-apparent, and should he, in the event of his grandfather now dying, be placed on the throne, as there is every reason

⁵³P.J.B. Rana, n. 17, 171.

⁵⁴Translation of the *lal-mohar* in Nepali, from Gurujyu Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalya, Kathmandu). The date of marriage mentioned in the *Vamsavali* is 1914 V.S. *Asar Sudi* 5, corresponding to 26 June 1857, as given above.

to believe that he would be, the wish so long cherished by the Rana family would be accomplished of having on the throne a lineal descendant of their own. To this end Jang Bahadur intermarried his son and daughters with the royal family.⁵⁵

The wishes of the Ranas were fulfilled when Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, maternal grandson of Jang Bahadur, succeeded to the throne on 19 May 1881. The Rana-royal family ties continued to be strengthened ever after and two of the four wives of King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah were the daughters of Rana Prime Minister Bir Shamsher (1885-1901).

By these and other measures the Ranas sought completely to depoliticise the kingship. This political impotence of the king, institutionalised during Jang Bahadur's rule, continued to be so throughout the Rana period. The officiating British Resident, reporting the death of Jang Bahadur and reflecting on the royal family's prospects of return to power, wrote to his government: "All accounts agree in representing the Royal family as completely effaced in respect to ability or opportunity for seizing the reins of government."⁵⁶

Formal Functions of the King

Throughout the Rana period the king continued to perform some functions as the traditional head of the state, the symbol of its unity and the centre of emotional loyalty of the people. His formal functions were as follows:

(i) He held darbar on important occasions to consult civil and military officers or to make proclamations and announcements. For instance, a darbar was held at the royal palace to confer the title of *maharaja* and the sovereignty of Kaski and Lamjung on

⁵⁵C.E.R. Girdlestone, Resident, to A.C. Lyall, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 30 April 1881, *Foreign Political A* (February 1882) 285, para 1. NAI. The Ranas were indifferent to the health of the kings (e.g. at the time of Surendra Bikram's death), so that their own descendant could occupy the throne as soon as possible. See *Foreign Political A* (February 1882) 290, paras 2 and 4. NAI.

⁵⁶F. Henvey, Officiating Resident, to T.H. Thornton, Officiating Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 1 March 1877, *Foreign Political A* (May 1877) 42, para 8. NAI.

Jang Bahadur. Sometimes a mock darbar⁵⁷ was arranged. Its purpose was to enable the British Resident or his representative to see that the king was really the head of the government.

(ii) He signed important state papers and legislative enactments, e.g. the *ains*, and issued legal instruments like *panjapatra*,⁵⁸ *lal-mohar*,⁵⁹ etc.

(iii) He, as the head of the state, received foreign envoys and sometimes directly corresponded with foreign governments.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the British Government on some occasions insisted on dealing with him alone as the head of the state, e.g. during the period of maharajaship of Jang and the prime ministership of Bam Bahadur.

While reporting the resumption of prime ministership by Jang Bahadur after the death of Bam Bahadur on 25 May 1857, the British Resident summed up the formal position of the king in the following words:

... the King is a mere puppet in Jung Bahadoor's hands, and that he has not even the shadow of power, the empty title of sovereign is still accorded to him, and he takes his place as such at the various ceremonies and festivals at which from long custom the King of the country is expected to be present. He is there treated with outward respect, but with the politics and management of the country he appears to have no concern, nor do I believe that he is ever spoken to regarding it.⁶¹

⁵⁷Such a darbar was arranged before the conferment of maharajaship and sovereignty of Kaski and Lamjung on Jang Bahadur. At this session, the king was shown as pressing upon Jang Bahadur to accept these and other honours, and the Orderly Officer at the British Residency had been called to be a witness, and to report to the Resident what he saw. See letter from Major G. Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 6 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 55, paras 1-3. NAI.

⁵⁸*Panjapatra* was an order or communication issued under the palm-print of the king. After 1846, the *panjapatra* is said to have been used only for the appointment orders of the Rana Prime Ministers.

⁵⁹See Appendix V.

⁶⁰For instance, see letter from the King to the Governor-General of India, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 December 1854) 32. NAI.

⁶¹Major G. Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 30 June 1857, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (25 September 1857) 471. NAI.

Rana Prime Minister

ACCORDING TO AVAILABLE records it was under the Rana¹ rule for the first time in the history of Nepal that the executive head of the government was called *prayam minista* (prime minister), a designation to which the title of *maharaja*² was prefixed after a few years. The maharaja prime minister occupied the highest and the central position in the governmental structure. He was the mainspring of political power in Nepal.

A brief account of the origin of this office is necessary to understand the distinctive character of the Rana political system. Jang Bahadur became the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal on 15 September 1846. After ten years of eventful rule, he resigned the prime ministership on 1 August 1856.³ Bam Bahadur, his younger brother, was appointed prime minister. But on 6 August 1856—five days after relinquishing prime ministership—Jang himself

¹For a long time before the Rana rule the executive head was called *mukhtiyar* and continued to be called so for the first few years of Rana rule.

²In common parlance the executive head was referred to as "prime minister." The complete title of the prime minister, however, was longer and regal. For example, the complete title of Jang Bahadur Rana at the height of his power and prestige was: "Maharaja Jang Bahadur Rana, G.C.B. and G.C.S.I., *Thong Lin-Pimma-Kokang-Vang-Syan*, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Nepal." While "G.C.B." and "G.C.S.I." were conferred on him by the British after 1857's Indian Rebellion, the italicised part of the title was conferred by the Chinese Emperor in 1871. The signification of the Chinese title is as follows: "The highly honoured (the most noble) Commander and Controller of Military and Political Affairs, the Augmenter and Instructor (disciplinarian) of the Army, the Aggrandizer of the Country, the Satisfier of the Law and High by increasing the prosperity and revenue of the Country, the Great Inheritor of Fidelity and Faithfulness to the Salt." See *Foreign Political A* (July 1871) 100-1. NAI. The same title was enjoyed by Prime Ministers Ranoddip Singh (1877-85) and Bir Shamsheer (1885-1901), with respective variations in the British part of it.

³The reasons for this resignation have been open to conjecture as discussed in Chapter 3.

acquired a higher position, though somewhat dubious, namely, the "maharajaship"⁴ of Kaski and Lamjung. In this position, he was more than the prime minister and less than the king, though he tried to influence both. In order to improve this position and to acquire complete control over the government of the country, Maharaja Jang Bahadur recaptured the prime ministership after the death of his younger brother Bam Bahadur, on 25 May 1857. He became the first "maharaja prime minister" of Nepal. Thus the institution of the maharaja prime minister came into vogue in 1857.

The maharaja prime minister was a peculiar institution of the Rana political system. It combined the functions of a prime minister and those of a king, having full sovereignty over a part of Nepal and in a sense sharing with the king the sovereignty over the rest of Nepal. The person holding this office could, if he wanted to, overshadow the king who was called *maharajadhiraj* as distinguished from *maharaja*—the title of the Rana Prime Minister. This coalescence of the prime ministership and the maharajaship owed itself to the ambitious personality of Jang Bahadur and perhaps the force of circumstances. But it is doubtful if Jang really wanted it to continue after his death because he had laid down two separate sets of rules of succession for each of them though they were interpreted differently by interested authorities. But, according to the interpretation that ultimately prevailed, the person who became the prime minister inherited the maharajaship too. This convention continued throughout the Rana period.

The maharaja prime ministership owed its peculiarity, first, to the law of succession which governed appointments to this office, and, secondly, to its omnipotent and autocratic character. The autocracy of the maharaja prime minister became all the more conspicuous in the context of the suppression of kingship during the Rana period.

⁴The British Resident refused to recognise two *maharajas* in Nepal and insisted that for their purpose the only legitimate authorities representing the Government of Nepal would be King Surendra Bikram Shah and the prime minister duly appointed by him, whoever it was. See Major Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 6 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 55, para 10, NAI.

*Method of Appointment**Law of Succession*

The appointment of the Rana Prime Minister⁵ took place according to what could be vaguely described as the law of agnatic succession, though precisely it was a slight modification of the agnatic principle. The law of succession in this regard was that the ruling prime minister would be succeeded first by all his brothers (or cousins) successively in order of seniority of age and then in the same manner by all his sons (or nephews). In other words, all the male members of the same generation would succeed one after another, to be followed by all the males of the next generation. The law was perhaps never put down in black and white as such. But its existence was manifest in the "rolls of succession" which were framed from time to time by the ruling prime minister, mentioning in hierarchical order the names of the incumbents to the office of the prime minister. However, the first indirect reference to the law was made in the *lal-mohar*^{5a} of 6 August 1856 (by which the maharajaship of Kaski and Lamjung was conferred on Jang Bahadur) in the following words:

In the roll of succession to the *mukhtiyari* [prime ministership] fixed by me [the king] for your brothers, the *mukhtiyari* after Dhir Shamsher Kunwar Ranaji is bestowed on your son Jagat Jang Kunwar Ranaji.

As regards maharajaship, it was bestowed on Jang Bahadur by King Surendra Bikram Shah as a reward for the various acts⁶

⁵For convenience, the "maharaja prime minister" will henceforth be referred to as "prime minister" only unless otherwise necessary.

^{5a}For full text, see Appendix III.

⁶The acts due to which King Surendra was pleased to grant to Jang Bahadur the *lal-mohar* of 6 August 1856 were:

- (i) Jang Bahadur secured the throne of Nepal to Surendra Bikram by killing those persons who were helping the junior queen of Rajendra Bikram Shah in her designs of putting her own son on the throne, in deprivation of the rights of Surendra Bikram.
- (ii) He promoted friendship with the queen of England by his visit to that country.

of kindness to the king and benefit to the country. The title of *maharaja* and the privileges associated with it were to be enjoyed by Jang Bahadur "up to offspring upon offspring"⁷; in other words, they were to be inherited by his heirs according to the principle of primogeniture.

From the laws of succession to the prime ministership and the maharajaship stated above, it is quite clear that the intention of Jang Bahadur was that succession to these two positions should take place differently, according to the agnatic and the primogenital principles respectively. But Ranoddip Singh who as the first brother of Jang Bahadur succeeded to the prime ministership in 1877 captured the maharajaship also by force. This combination of prime ministership and maharajaship in the same person, once achieved, was perpetuated by the succeeding prime ministers so that a tradition developed that whoever was the prime minister acquired the maharajaship also. Therefore, the general law of appointment to the office of the maharaja prime minister was that of hereditary succession according to the agnatic principle by which all the male members—brothers and cousins—of one generation were to succeed to this office in order of seniority of age before the office could pass to the next generation.

- (iii) He won the war with Tibet, and made her pay to Nepal a huge sum of money every year.
- (iv) He treated with respect and kindness King Surendra's father, ex-King Rajendra, in spite of the latter's conspiracies against his life.
- (v) He exempted from death sentence and, instead, kept with respect in detention for five years King Surendra's younger brother, Prince Upendra Bikram, who was an accomplice in a conspiracy against his life.
- (vi) During his prime ministership, he had satisfied the nobility, the soldiery and the peasantry of Nepal, given them justice, and promoted peace and prosperity.
- (vii) He had increased the military force of Nepal, observed economy, and added to the state exchequer.

For complete text of the *lal-mohar*, see Appendix III.

⁷This translation of the relevant line of the original *lal-mohar* is quoted in a letter from C. Girdlestone, Resident, to A.C. Lyall, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, dated 5 May 1879, *Foreign Political A* (September 1879) 386-90, K.W. No. 1. NAI.

Roll of Succession

As mentioned earlier, succession to prime ministership took place in accordance with a "roll of succession" which was based on the law of succession as stated above. This roll was drawn up by the ruling prime minister, though it was always issued in the name of the king. It laid down in hierarchical order the names of lawful claimants to various high offices of the state from the prime minister downwards. The offices were:⁸ (i) Commander-in-Chief; (ii) Senior Commanding-General for the West; (iii) Commanding-General for the East; (iv) Commanding-General for the South; (v) Commanding-General for the North; (vi) Generals; (vii) Lieutenant Generals; (viii) Major Generals; (ix) Lieutenant Colonels; (x) Colonels. etc.

After the death of the prime minister, every junior officer got promoted to the next higher rank so that the commander-in-chief automatically became the prime minister, the senior commanding-general became the commander-in-chief, and so forth. The roll of succession, initiated by the *lal-mohar* of 6 August 1856, was revised⁹ by Jang Bahadur in 1860 and 1868. Later, Bir Shamsher and other prime ministers either made new rolls or revised the existing ones. The extent to which the prime ministers after Jang Bahadur succeeded to office in accordance with these rolls will be discussed later. The reasons which prompted Jang Bahadur to frame the law of succession mentioned above may be studied first.

Reasons behind Law of Succession

Obviously, Jang Bahadur framed this law of succession mainly to keep this office confined to the Rana family. But why he prescribed succession first for his brothers and then for his sons is still a matter of speculation. This law was not only peculiar in itself but was a radical departure from the Nepalese tradition. It enabled the Ranas to rule for more than a hundred years. Jang

⁸Based on data provided by Babu Ram Acharya, Kathmandu, from his valuable personal collection of manuscripts and inscriptions, henceforth to be referred to as "Acharya Collections." See also Perceval Landon, *Nepal* (London, 1928) I, 248-50; and Bholanath Powdela, Dhanavajra Vajracharya and Gyanamani Nepal, *Itihas Samsodhan* (2009 V.S.) No. 1, 3-4.

⁹Acharya Collections, n. 8.

Bahadur while framing it must have drawn from his study of Nepal's history. Referring to this, Ikbal Ali Shah points out:

... Maharaja Jang Bahadur had observed, with a rather bewildering frequency, the weaknesses of a succession table which gave power to the eldest son. More often than not the new ruler was [an] infant of tender years, and such power as was his automatically passed to a Regent or to Ministers amongst whom the fire of personal ambition burned strongly.¹⁰

Commenting on the *lal-mohar* which laid down the new rule of succession, Shah says:

The famous "sanad" [*lal-mohar*] ... was, undoubtedly, in a very large measure, the work of Jung Bahadur himself. It was not a document hastily conceived, or drawn upon the spur of the moment by a monarch who desired to honour one whose services to the state had been so outstanding. Its very format points to much thought and consideration, for it is not to be supposed for one moment that a purely Hindu dynasty could have of itself embarked upon such sweeping innovations.¹¹

The first reason, therefore, that strikes one as having motivated Jang Bahadur to lay down agnatic succession was to avoid the possibility of the government falling into the hands of minor and immature sons and to check the consequent chances of real power reverting to the king or slipping away to some other family.¹² However, this law of succession did not provide against the chance of the prime ministership falling into the hands of an immature or weak brother. Perceval Landon criticising the law on this score wrote, "... mere age is no guarantee that the eldest survivor of any generation is necessarily fit for the responsibilities of the post."¹³

¹⁰Ikbal Ali Shah, *Nepal, the Home of Gods* (London, n. d.) 110-1.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²According to some Nepalese scholars, there was also a fear of the real power slipping away to the British, as was happening in some Indian states. But it is difficult to say for certain how far Jang Bahadur had this too in mind, particularly after his visit to England.

¹³Perceval Landon, n. 8, II, 54.

It was the alleged weakness and unpopularity of Maharaja Deva Shamsher—prime minister for less than four months in 1901—that led to his deposition at the hands of Chandra Shamsher and party in June 1901.¹⁴

The second reason for the creation of such a law perhaps was that, by enabling his brothers to be prime ministers, Jang wanted to express his gratitude for the almost indispensable support they had given him in capturing power. The brothers, no doubt, had been his chief source of strength in destroying the hostile forces during the kot-massacre and afterwards. They were entrusted with important civil and military offices¹⁵ of the state when premiership was conferred on Jang Bahadur. They of course succeeded in confining the prime ministership to the Rana family. But they repaid Jang Bahadur badly by depriving his sons of their legitimate right¹⁶ of inheritance to the title of *maharaja* and the estates of Kaski and Lamjung after his death. Ranoddip Singh, the next incumbent of the prime ministership, captured the maharajaship also with the help of the military and the support of his brothers.¹⁷ The seed of discord sown within the Rana family by this unlawfu!

¹⁴For details, see *ibid.*, 79-82.

¹⁵The offices and ranks given to the brothers were as follows:

- (i) Kaji Bam Bahadur Kunwar: Bada Kausi (Central Treasury and Expenditure)
- (ii) Kaji Badri Narsingh Kunwar: *Kumari Chok* (Accounts Office)
- (iii) Kaji Jay Bahadur Kunwar: *Chyangre Kausi* (Other Treasury)
- (iv) Krishna Bahadur Kunwar: Commander Colonelship and Commander at Palpa
- (v) Ranoddip Singh Kunwar: Colonelship
- (vi) Jagat Shamsher Jang Kunwar: Colonelship
- (vii) Dhir Shamsher Jang Kunwar: Colonelship

Gurujyu Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalaya, Kathmandu)

¹⁶See discussion earlier in this Chapter, and the *lal-mohar* of 6 August 1856, Appendix III.

¹⁷C. Girdlestone, the British Resident, in this connection wrote: "Ranoodeep Singh, however, on Jung Bahadur's death not only became Prime Minister, but with his brother's consent, and I suppose with the enforced acquiescence of the Maharaja Adhiraj, took possession of and still enjoys the revenues of Kaski and Lamjung." See his letter to A.C. Lyall, n. 7.

act¹⁸ led to the *coup* of 1885 in which Ranoddip and some of Jang's sons were killed and as a result of which the roll of succession could not be adhered to.

The third reason that must have prompted Jang Bahadur to formulate this law and frame the roll of succession was that the brothers, realising that they were the beneficiaries, would maintain the sanctity of the law and the roll. The generation of brothers led by Jang Bahadur did maintain the sanctity of the law as far as the prime ministership¹⁹ was concerned. Jang Bahadur was succeeded by Ranoddip Singh in accordance with the roll. But the sanctity of the roll was not maintained by the next generation of brothers—sons and nephews of Jang Bahadur. As all the brothers of Jang Bahadur had died, Ranoddip Singh should have been succeeded, as provided in the roll, by Jagat Jang, the eldest son of Jang Bahadur. But the son of Dhir Shamsher, Jang's youngest brother, captured the prime ministership by the *coup* of 1885. The roll, however, was respected for a long time after this by the sons of Dhir Shamsher.²⁰

Succession of Ranoddip, Bir, Deva and Chandra

The roll of succession as left by Jang Bahadur was completely changed by Bir Shamsher—the eldest son of Dhir Shamsher—after

¹⁸Colonel J.C. Berkely, Officiating Resident, commented on it in 1885 as follows: "Contrary to the terms of the Sanad, Ranodip Singh insisted that the provinces of Kaski and Lamjung and the title of Maharaja should go with the Premiership. Jagat Jang fiercely protested but without avail; this was the commencement of the dissensions [which led to the *coup* of 1885] between him and his uncles." See his letter to H.M. Durand, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 7 December 1885, *Foreign Secret E* (August 1886) 63, para 18. NAI.

It is necessary to note here that Perceval Landon has gone out of his way to defend the interests of the usurpers by pointing out that the maharajaship of Kaski and Lamjung was originally intended to be "the appanage of each successive Prime Minister in turn, whoever he might be." See Landon, n. 8, II, 58.

¹⁹Because the law of succession to the maharajaship was violated by Ranoddip Singh, as has been seen earlier.

²⁰The sons of Dhir Shamsher who became prime ministers in succession were: (i) Bir Shamsher, 1885-1901; (ii) Deva Shamsher, March-June 1901; (iii) Chandra Shamsher, 1901-29; (iv) Bhim Shamsher, 1929-32; (v) Juddha Shamsher, 1932-45.

he captured the prime ministership by the *coup* of 1885. Of the four prime ministers who succeeded Jang Bahadur in the period under study, Ranoddip Singh and Deva Shamsher only can be regarded as having succeeded in accordance with the original and the changed rolls but the succession of Bir Shamsher and Chandra Shamsher was in violation of the respective rolls. In fact, the seizure of prime ministership by Bir Shamsher and Chandra Shamsher may be termed as "accession" rather than "succession."

Ranoddip Singh and Bir Shamsher. The first sixteen positions in the roll of succession as revised last by Jang Bahadur and issued with royal assent on 3 February 1868²¹ were:

- (i) *Sri Tin Maharaj*²² Jang Bahadur Kunwar Rana Ji, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief;
- (ii) Commander-in-Chief General²³ Ranoddip Singh K.R.J. (Jang's brother);
- (iii) Senior Commanding-General Jagat Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Western Command) (Jang's brother);
- (iv) Commanding-General Dhir Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Eastern Command) (Jang's brother);
- (v) Commanding-General Jagat Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Southern Command) (Jang's son);
- (vi) Commanding-General Jit Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Northern Command) (Jang's son);

²¹Corresponding to 1924 V.S., *Margh Sudi* 10. Acharya Collections, n. 8, also agrees with a roll given in B. Powdela, D. Vajracharya and G. Nepal, n. 8. For full roll, see Appendix IV.

²²*Sri tin maharaj* was the abbreviated form of the prefix *Sri* used thrice with *maharaja*, as *Sri Sri Sri Maharaja*. The parallel expression for the king, to distinguish him from the prime minister, was *Sri Panch Maharajadhiraj*, abbreviated form of *Sri Sri Sri Sri Sri Maharajadhiraj*.

²³A senior Rana told the writer that the members of the Rana oligarchy assumed the general's title not necessarily because their government was based on the control of the military, or because each one of them performed military functions. In fact, this title was held by even those who performed only civil functions. They assumed this title because, in the contemporary world, it represented the combination of a warrior and an administrator, with a glory and prestige of its own. It may be noted that this title was used sometimes even before the Ranas, for instance by General Bhim Sen Thapa.

- (vii) General Padma Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Jang's son);
- (viii) any other legitimate son of Jang Bahadur, if born;
- (ix) Lieutenant General Babar Jang K.R.J. (Jang's illegitimate son);
- (x) Lieutenant General Ranbir Jang K.R.J. (Jang's illegitimate son);
- (xi) Yuddha Pratap Jang Bahadur K.R.J., the son of Commanding-General Jagat Jang, from his wife—the queen's daughter (Jang's grandson);
- (xii) any son, if born to Commanding-General Jit Jang, from his wife—the queen's daughter (Jang's would-be grandson).

The positions after the twelfth were given to the sons of Jang's six brothers, i.e. Jang's nephews, as follows.

- (xiii) Major General Kedar Nursingh K.R.J. (Badri Narsingh's son);
- (xiv) Major General Bam Bikram Bahadur K.R.J. (Bam Bahadur's son);
- (xv) Major General Buddhi Bikram Bahadur K.R.J.;
- (xvi) Lieutenant Colonel Bir Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir Shamsher's son).

Ranoddip Singh became the prime minister after the death of Jang Bahadur in 1877 in accordance with the above roll. But this roll could not be kept up after Ranoddip Singh because of the family dissensions among the sons of Jang Bahadur on the one hand and their uncles and cousins on the other. These dissensions had their origin in Ranoddip Singh's unlawful succession to the maharajaship, as noted earlier.²⁴ The events that ultimately led to the violation of the roll by Jang Bahadur's nephews were as follows.

Having been deprived of his legitimate right Jagat Jang, the eldest son of Jang Bahadur, nursed a grudge against his uncle, Ranoddip Singh, ever since the latter captured the maharajaship. After the promotion of Ranoddip Singh to prime ministership, Jagat

²⁴See n. 18 above.

Shamsher became commander-in-chief, and Dhir Shamsher senior commanding-general of the western forces. But Jagat Jang's grudge against his uncles was accentuated by another event after the death of Jagat Shamsher in 1879. Dhir Shamsher who was to become the commander-in-chief was reluctant to relinquish the command of the western forces, because of its importance,²⁵ in favour of Jagat Jang, its legal incumbent. But Jagat Jang insisted on having his right and did become the western commanding-general. His uncles, however, began to suspect²⁶ him of attempting to conspire against the prime minister and to replace the king by the heir-apparent. At the death of King Surendra Bikram Shah in 1881, they took extraordinary military precautions against Jagat Jang.²⁷ Finally, they implicated Jagat Jang in January 1882 in a large-scale conspiracy which reflected the widespread discontent of all the dispossessed elements—Thapas, Bistas, Basniats, and Pandes—against the Ranas. This conspiracy, however, was betrayed and suppressed in time. But Jagat Jang, who happened to be in India when the plot was unearthed, was kept under detention by the British at the request of the Nepalese Government. His name was expunged from the roll of succession.

Dhir Shamsher died on 15 October 1884. Ranoddip Singh was thus deprived of the support of a man of ability, strength and determination. Immediately after Dhir's death, two factions emerged

²⁵The commander of the western forces, the bulk of the army, was brought more directly into contact with the troops than the commander-in-chief. The uncles feared the increase of Jagat Jang's influence among them, if he was given their commanding-generalship. Dhir Shamsher, therefore, wanted to retain it himself, even willing to let Jagat Jang become commander-in-chief. See letter from J. C. Berkeley to H.M. Durand, n. 18, para 18.

The fact that the western commanding-general was, from the military point of view, more important than the commander-in-chief, may sound anomalous. But under the Rana administration, the commander-in-chief was particularly in charge of the Home and General Administration, whereas the western commanding-general, known as the senior commanding-general, was for all practical purposes in charge of the military. For details, see Chapter 5.

²⁶For suspicions against Jagat Jang, see letter from J.C. Berkeley to H.M. Durand, n. 18, paras 19-26.

²⁷The uncles also made haste to enthrone Surendra's minor grandson, Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, before Jagat Jang could implement his designs. Surendra's son, the then heir-apparent, had died earlier in 1878.

on the political scene of Nepal: (i) the sons of Jang Bahadur who by right were to succeed to the premiership (after Ranoddip Singh), and (ii) the sons of Dhir Shamsher who wished to supplant them. The second faction consisted of more than half a dozen strong, educated and disciplined brothers. Having been placed in important positions in the army when their father was the western commanding-general and later the commander-in-chief, they had lately been gaining greater control of the army. They had also been the favourites of their uncle, Ranoddip Singh. But the sons of Jang Bahadur were dissipated and weak, particularly after Jagat Jang had been set aside. A number of his sons were illegitimate and little more than boys. Therefore, they were not on the roll and were hardly to be reckoned with. Thus, the balance of power was in favour of the second group.

Immediately after Dhir Shamsher's death, Jagat Jang's sisters—wives of the late Heir-Apparent Trailokya Bikram Shah—and the Bari Maharani of Ranoddip Singh²⁸ and others began to work for the return of Jagat Jang. Jagat Jang returned to Nepal and appeared in Kathmandu on 6 April 1885. Immediately, he was placed under arrest in Kathmandu. However, he was released after some time and he had several interviews with Ranoddip Singh. Later, his family was also allowed to return to Nepal. All this gave an impression as if Ranoddip Singh was inclined to reinstate Jagat Jang and this caused apprehensions in the minds of the sons of Dhir Shamsher. They feared that if Jagat Jang came to power he would certainly avenge the wrongs done to him at their hands and at the hands of their father earlier. They, therefore, began to rally their forces. Finding suitable opportunity,²⁹ they struck on the

²⁸Letter from J.C. Berkeley to H.M. Durand, n. 18, para 30.

²⁹Col. J.C. Berkeley, Officiating Resident, wrote in this connection as follows: "They redoubled their endeavours to increase their influence, and through the almost doting credulity of their uncle succeeded to a great extent; the Queen Mother was won over to their side, and, owing to the illness of Jeet Jang, the apathy and indolence of Padam Jang, and the seconding of Ranbir Jang [all three Jang Bahadur's sons] for civil duties, the Dhir Shamsher party had the most favourable opportunities for working the army of which they made the best. During their father's term of office as Commander-in-Chief, he had gradually filled the higher ranks with adherents of his party; thus their task was made easier." See his letter to H.M. Durand, n. 18, para 31.

night of 22 November 1885 and murdered Ranoddip Singh, Jagat Jang, and his son Yuddha Pratap Jang. The remaining sons of Jang Bahadur and other members of the group either took asylum in the British Residency or fled. Bir Shamsher, the eldest son of Dhir Shamsher, became the new prime minister, contrary to the provisions of the existing roll of succession. He made a new roll which regulated succession henceforth.

This act of Bir Shamsher was actuated by the apprehension that, if any of Jang Bahadur's sons acquired the prime ministership as stipulated in the roll, he and his brothers would be the worst sufferers. Bir Shamsher's name in the roll of succession which was effective³⁰ at the time of Ranoddip Singh's assassination was placed after not only the sons and the senior nephews but also the grandson of Jang Bahadur. Therefore, he considered it useless to wait for his lawful turn which was as low as seventh. In these circumstances a *coup d'etat* was the only alternative which was in no way against the national tradition of establishing the validity of a succession by the use of force.³¹ The British lost no time to recognise the

³⁰This roll was as follows: (i) *Maharaj* Ranoddip Singh, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief (Jang's brother); (ii) Commander-in-Chief General Jit Jang (Jang's son); (iii) Senior Commanding-General Padam Jang (Western Command) (Jang's son); (iv) Commanding-General Ranbir Jang (Eastern Command) (Jang's illegitimate son); (v) Commanding-General Yuddha Pratap Jang (Southern Command) (Jang's grandson); (vi) Commanding-General Kedar Narsingh (Northern Command) (Jang's nephew); (vii) General Bir Shamsher (Jang's nephew). Acharya Collections, n. 8. For complete roll see Appendix IV.

³¹In a note on the revolution of 1885, Colonel J.C. Berkeley referred to the legitimacy of Bir Shamsher's action, and the claim of Jang Bahadur's sons on British interference on their behalf, as follows: "The Nepalese politician regards assassination as a simple and natural process for the attainment of power. Of Ministers for some time past Jang Bahadur alone died a natural death. As to the question of right it is impossible to ignore the fact, not only that Jang Bahadur had no legitimate claim to the position he reached but that the means by which he attained it were not dissimilar from the proceedings of the Shamsher brothers [Dhir Shamsher's sons]. Jang Bahadur did in fact obtain power by the murder of his uncle, and consolidated it by a wholesale massacre. In regard to his [Jang Bahadur's] claims upon Government [British], no doubt they were great; for Jung Bahadur was a loyal and valuable ally; but his services were amply recognised in his lifetime; and the protection and support afforded to his family on the

new government,³² first, because it was Nepal's internal affair and they thought it best to deal with the party which had *de facto* control of the government, and, secondly, they thought that a party which had usurped power by force would be more eager to please them.³³

Dev Shamsher and Chandra Shamsher. The first few positions in the new roll³⁴ made by Maharaja Bir Shamsher were as follows:

- (i) *Sri Tin Maharaj* Bir Shamsher Jang Rana Bahadur, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief;
- (ii) Commander-in-Chief General Khadga Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
- (iii) Senior Commanding-General Ran Shamsher J.R.B.

occasion of the late revolution were no small matters." Note by Colonel J.C. Berkeley, late Officiating Resident, dated 4 January 1887, *Foreign Secret E* (February 1887) 406. NAI.

³²Colonel Berkeley refers to the British attitude as follows: "The Government [British] eventually decided to recognize the new Minister, and this was done in a Kharita which expressed in marked terms the grave dissatisfaction of His Excellency in Council at the crimes which had been committed, and contained a warning against bloodshed and bad government for the future. As regards the effect of the revolution on the relations of Nepal with the British Government the undersigned has no doubt that the immediate result was favourable. Never before had the Nepalese Darbar awaited with such anxiety and dread the verdict of our Government on a question of its internal policy So far as the present writer could judge, and up to the time when he left Nepal, the outcome of the revolution was a distinct strengthening of British influence. ... As an instance of the stronger hold which it gave us on the Darbar, the fact of the exertions made by it to obtain recruits for our Gurkha regiments may be cited." See Note by Berkeley, n. 31.

³³*Amrit Bazar Patrika*, in its issue of 16 April 1890, challenged the morality of the British action in recognising Bir Shamsher's government, and explained it as follows: "But the Foreign Office [British] looked to its own immediate interests. It came to the conclusion that the usurpers would be naturally more subservient than the rightful owners, and so they stuck to the former; where the idea of the Revolution originated, we know not; but it seems clear that but for the immediate support of the British Government to the usurpers, they could have never been able to maintain their hold of the kingdom." See Kaiser Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana, comp., *Nepal News: 1884-1925* (Kathmandu) I. This is a press clippings file, running into eight volumes, personally compiled by the Rana.

³⁴Acharya Collections, n. 8. For full roll, see Appendix IV.

- (Western Command) (Bir's brother);
- (iv) Commanding-General Dev Shamsher J.R.B. (Eastern Command) (Bir's brother);
- (v) Commanding-General Chandra Shamsher J.R.B. (Southern Command) (Bir's brother);
- (vi) Commanding-General Bhim Shamsher J.R.B. (Northern Command) (Bir's brother);
- (vii) General Fateh Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
- (viii) General Lalit Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
- (ix) General Jit Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
- (x) Colonel Juddha Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother).

The name of Khadga Shamsher, the commander-in-chief, was struck off the roll because of his complicity in a conspiracy against the prime minister in 1887. Ran Shamsher, the senior commanding-general, died in the same year. Dev Shamsher, the eastern commanding-general, was therefore the commander-in-chief and immediate heir to the prime ministership after 1887. When Bir Shamsher died a natural death in March 1901, Dev took over as the prime minister in accordance with the roll. This was the second regular succession in the history of the Rana rule.

Since the incumbents on the prime minister's roll after Dev Shamsher were all brothers, it was expected that the sanctity of the roll would be maintained for a long time to come. But events of the next few months proved again that in matters of succession in Nepal what was really important was not the declared law but the balance of political forces. Within four months of Dev Shamsher's succession, his younger and stronger brothers were convinced of his "weakness" and "incompetence to rule effectively."³⁵ They

³⁵*Englishman*, dated 3 July 1901, pointed out that Maharaja Dev Shamsher during his short administration had given great dissatisfaction to his brothers, and had paid no heed to their advice on several important political questions. The paper further states: "Ever since his accession to power, early in March last ... Maharaja Dev Shamsher Jang Rana Bahadur has repeatedly given way to whims and caprices, and has all along acted as a tool in the hands of a few designing men and irresponsible advisers. In the course of four months anarchy and misrule of the worst description gradually took the place of order and good government."

Pioneer, dated 4 July 1901, referred to Dev Shamsher's rule somewhat

regarded his liberal measures³⁶ as potentially dangerous to the perpetuation of the power of the usurpers, i.e., the Shamsher brothers. To maintain their hold, they wanted a really strong person to be the prime minister. Therefore, all the younger brothers surrounded and imprisoned Prime Minister Dev Shamsher on the evening of 26 June 1901 when he was returning from a prize-distribution at a high school which had been specifically arranged for this purpose. He was forced to abdicate in the presence of the king. Chandra Shamsher, the next incumbent on the roll, was appointed the maharaja prime minister.

The succession of Chandra Shamsher, though not accompanied by bloodshed, cannot be considered as normal. No doubt, Chandra Shamsher was the next incumbent on the roll. But the spirit of the roll implied that the prime ministership should pass on to the next incumbent only after the death or voluntary retirement of the occupant who in this case was Dev Samsher.

Powers and Functions

Referring to the scope of the prime minister's functions, Pudma Jung wrote about Jang Bahadur:

The Maharaja's work was not confined only to initiative in legislation, as is the case with that of the Prime Minister of Great Britain; it was not only limited to control and superintendence, not only to sanctioning and signing, but it also comprehended all those minute details of execution and accomplishment which fall to the lot of a hoary patriarch of a huge family.³⁷

similarly: "The mismanagement of public business, his growing unpopularity, and the expanding volume of people's discontent at the erratic behaviour of the Minister..." See Kaiser Shamsher J.B. Rana, n. 33.

³⁶The real reason that is said to have led to the deposition of Dev Shamsher was his liberal policy which frightened his brothers who thought that it was likely to weaken their hold on the country. This policy included his attempts to abolish slavery and to extend primary education, and his talk of introducing a council consisting of representatives of the people. His brothers and other Nepali chiefs considered these measures as premature.

³⁷Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, *Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal* (Abhay Charan Mukerji, ed., Allahabad, 1909) 275.

Hassoldt Davies describes the Rana Prime Minister's autocracy, as narrated to him by the British Resident, in the following words:

You know, of course, that there is a King of Nepal as well as the Maharaja, and that the Maharaja is properly the Prime Minister. The King, whose real title is Maharaj Adhiraj is as much a puppet as the King of Italy, while the Prime Minister, or Maharaja, has almost autocratic powers. The entire national revenue passes through his hands. There is no doubt that he is one of the wealthiest men in the world, and perhaps one of the wisest, to maintain his kingdom inviolate from the foreign influence.³⁸

The Rana Prime Minister had absolute power in the field of state activity, overriding the king and all officers.³⁹ He could easily be regarded as the *de facto* sovereign. The king was only a *de jure* head. These powers of the prime minister were wrested by Jang Bahadur by means of two *lal-mohars*, one of which conferred on him the maharajaship of Kaski and Lamjung on 6 August 1856, and the other gave him a second term of prime ministership on 28 June 1857.⁴⁰ The effect of the two *lal-mohars* was that Jang Bahadur

³⁸Hassoldt Davies, *Nepal, Land of Mystery* (London, 1943) 201. The above statement, though made in 1943, is equally true of the whole Rana period.

³⁹Referring to Prime Minister Jang Bahadur's omnipotence, which was more or less true of the subsequent prime ministers too, Captain Cavenagh wrote: "All written and verbal communications, relative to affairs political, fiscal and judicial, are submitted to the Minister who generally proceeds to issue his orders thereon without consulting in any way either the opinion of the Maharaja [King] or that of the Grand Council; in fact although Kazis and officers of rank are still eligible to become members of the latter and to be summoned to give advice in matters of importance when the exigencies of the state may demand it, the assembly is seldom convened and has little influence.

"The minute supervision exercised by General Jung Bahadur over the management of all departments of the state is most extraordinary ... not a rupee is expended from the public treasury ... without his knowledge and sanction. All appointments, civil or military, are conferred by the Minister and all complaints regarding the conduct of public officials are brought to his notice ..." See Captain Cavenagh, *Report on the State of Nepal, its Government, Army and Resources* (Calcutta, 1874) 15.

⁴⁰Bam Bahadur died on 25 May 1857, and after some period of mourning Jang Bahadur was reappointed as the prime minister by a *lal-mohar* dated 28 June 1857.

acquired absolute powers. The extent to which these powers were exercised by the subsequent prime ministers varied with the personality of each incumbent. The *lal-mohar* dated 6 August 1856⁴¹ declared:

... [For reasons aforesaid] you are hereby conferred with the title of Maharaja of Kaski and Lamjung. Being the *Maharaja* of these places, you are authorized to prevent me [the King] from trying to coerce the nobility, the peasantry or the soldiery, or disturbing the friendly relations with the Queen of England and the Emperor of China. At the time of your preventing me from doing so, if I offer any forcible resistance, the nobility and the army will assist you. You will advise Prime Minister Bam Bahadur if he defaults in matters of military, civil and administrative appointments and dismissals, and promotion of friendship with the Emperors of England and China. If he refuses to abide by your advice and resorts to any force, my chiefs, nobles and the army are hereby asked to act on your orders. You will keep the people of your estates happy. While performing justice, you are granted the power to give death sentence. You are also granted the power, for the period of your lifetime, to kill anyone in my kingdom who tries to disturb the peace of your estates.⁴² All this will be enjoyed by you up to offspring upon offspring....

The *lal-mohar* dated 28 June 1857 empowered Jang Bahadur as follows:

.. I [the King] have given him [Jang Bahadur] power to declare war, to make peace, and to control the domestic arrangements

⁴¹For abstract translation of the full *lal-mohar*, see Appendix III.

⁴²These powers made Jang Bahadur an absolute ruler *over the whole of Nepal*, though that is not stated in this document so precisely. In a reference to these powers, Jang Bahadur's son and biographer Pudma Jung seems to have used deliberately precise language in favour of Jang Bahadur, by writing that on 6 August 1856, apart from the maharajaship, he was "also invested with powers and privileges of a sovereign character, that he could exercise not only within the area of his hereditary domains, but also *over the whole of the country between the Mahakali on the west and the Michi on the east.*" (Italics added.) See P. J. B. Rana, n. 37, 194.

of the State with full Military, Judicial and Civil authority in all cases; he is empowered to appoint or dismiss from public situations, to control the Punjensee [Pajani] or periodical tenure of appointments and enlistments, and I have also delegated to him the powers of life and death.

It will be his particular duty to keep up the friendship now existing between Nepal and the British and China Governments, as well as to preserve peace with Bhote [Tibet].

All persons under my authority whether they be Civil or Military Officers, Councillors, Nobles, soldiers or subjects, are placed under him, and will carry on their duties in subordination to him; those who act in obedience to his orders will receive honours and titles from him, but he has been empowered to fine, or to imprison, or even to put to death those who may disobey him; in fact, he may do to them whatever he may think proper; but I have desired him at once to put to death all who will not obey him.

These powers are conferred upon him for his lifetime.⁴³...

A study of the powers with which the Rana Prime Minister was invested by virtue of those two documents enables us to understand the scope and extent of his functions. As stated earlier, the scope of his activity covered everything that falls to the lot of a hoary patriarch of a large family. He was the head of the state and of the society in the real sense of the term. As the head of administration, he was the source of all authority and the entire governmental machinery was responsible to him directly. He ruled the country as his personal estate and derived maximum personal benefit out of it. As such, administration of the country was marked by secrecy and intrigue. The wide scope of the activities of the prime minister and the various channels through which he exercised control may be studied, to the extent permitted by available data, under the following heads: executive, legislative, financial, judicial, military, and general.

⁴³For abstract translation of the full *lal-mohar*, see Appendix III.

Executive

The prime minister was the chief executive and in this capacity he alone had the power of patronage which extended to all civil and military offices. There were two instruments, namely, the "roll of succession" and the institution of *pajani*, through which the prime minister exercised this power.

Roll of Succession. The roll of succession, as noted earlier, regulated appointments of the Rana oligarchy to the hierarchy of senior civil and military offices which were open to the Ranas only. This hierarchy, at the top of which was the office of the prime minister, included the offices of the commander-in-chief, the commanding-generals, the generals, the colonels, etc. These officers, though holding military titles, performed civil functions also.⁴⁴ For instance, the commander-in-chief was actually the head of the Home and the General Administration. The commanding-generals, though military heads of their respective regions, also performed civil functions. The generals and the colonels were often directors of various departments. The persons holding these important positions in the administration had, of necessity, to be acceptable to the prime minister. Technically, no doubt, they were on the roll because of their priority of birth in a particular generation. Nevertheless, a vacancy could be caused in any position of the roll not only by the death or disability of a particular occupant but also by expulsion by the prime minister. Thus Jagat Jang, Jang Bahadur's eldest son, was ousted from the roll by Maharaja Ranoddip Singh for alleged conspiratorial activities.⁴⁵ Maharaja Bir Shamsher, for similar reasons, ousted his younger brother Khadga Shamsher.⁴⁶ As a result of these expulsions, the juniors in the roll were automatically promoted to higher positions.

Over and above the prime minister's power to expel from the roll persons not acceptable to him, he had the power to frame the roll in such a manner as to introduce in it persons of his choice. For instance, Maharaja Jang Bahadur, in spite of the declared principle

⁴⁴Their respective functions will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁴⁵See letter from J.C. Berkeley to H.M. Durand, n. 18, paras 24 and 29; and Perceval Landon, n. 8, II, 60.

⁴⁶Perceval Landon, n. 8, II, 76-7.

of succession of brothers to be followed by succession of sons and nephews—males of the next generation—introduced in the roll of 1868 his grandson Yuddha Pratap Jang in priority to his nephews.⁴⁷

Pajani. The second important instrument by which the Rana Prime Minister exercised his power of patronage was the institution of *pajani*. According to this institution which in its origin was much older than the Rana rule (perhaps in existence since the origin of the Shah dynasty at Gorkha), all civil and military appointments in Nepal, including the prime minister's, were of a year's duration. The king, after a sort of screening held every year, used to renew or terminate the existing appointments, or make new ones on the occasion of the annual *pajani*. It was during one of these annual screenings in 1837 that Mukhtiyar Bhim Sen Thapa was abruptly deprived of his military powers. Thus *pajani* was originally an important instrument in the hands of the king to change the character and composition of the government.

The power of *pajani* changed hands during the Rana rule. It came to be exercised by the prime minister as a part of the general power of appointment and dismissal conferred on Jang Bahadur. *Ipso facto*, therefore, the office of the prime minister was exempted from this annual screening. Jang Bahadur was aware of the havoc played by this institution in the past when, as a result of odd influences working on the imbecile mind of the king, revolutionary changes were made in the personnel of the government. But instead of abolishing this institution he made use of it to eliminate gradually from the administration his opponents and appoint his own men.⁴⁸ The institution continued to exist throughout the Rana period.⁴⁹

A well known and usual reason for dismissals on the occasion of *pajani* was the visits paid by an employee to an officer against the

⁴⁷See Jang Bahadur's roll of 1868 in Appendix IV.

⁴⁸Chittaranjan Nepali, *Bhim Sen Thapa ra Tatakalin Nepal* (Kathmandu, 2015 V.S.) 38. (Nepali.)

⁴⁹The system of *pajani* in essence prevailed in Nepal even after the overthrow of the Ranas, though the periodicity of screening the government personnel was irregular, often more than a year. After the dismissal of Nepali Congress government in 1960, however, the frequent changes of government personnel have been more for political reasons.

wishes of the prime minister. This employee exposed himself to the suspicion of being an accomplice in a conspiracy against the prime minister. Similarly, if a person did not pay homage to the prime minister by regularly attending one of the *darbars*, held by him to give audience to persons of all ranks and to hear petitions, etc.,⁵⁰ or if a person missed doing so for some days, he was likely to lose the prime minister's favour and consequently his employment.⁵¹

Certain appointments were neither extended nor terminated at a particular *pajani*, but the persons holding them were kept in reserve for being subsequently employed elsewhere. Such persons were said to be put in *jagera*. The term that applied to the renewal, continuation or extension of previous appointment was *thamauti*.

It may be noted that the annual *pajani* did not mean that the prime minister could not make appointments and dismissals in the course of the year. In fact, the Rana Prime Minister could dismiss any one at any time in spite of the *pajani*, with or without any reasons. This power of the prime minister was known as *tharokhosuwa*.⁵²

The executive work of the prime minister included control of the various departments of administration like *muluki adda* (Home and General), *mumsi khana* (Foreign), etc. through their heads who met him daily either in *darbar* or in private. The prime minister issued final executive orders relating to every department. Such an order was known as *khadga nisana* because it bore the prime minister's seal containing the print of a *khadga*, i.e. sword.

The prime minister had also the power to declare war, make peace, and conclude treaties. For instance, Jang Bahadur concluded a treaty with Tibet in 1856. The prime minister could, if necessary, hold special *darbars* for discussing foreign policy issues. For example, Ranoddip Singh held a special *darbar* at Narain Hitti palace in 1883 to discuss the issue of war against Tibet.⁵³

⁵⁰This practice, known as *chakari*, will be discussed in detail under judicial powers of the prime minister.

⁵¹An important Rana source.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 15.

Legislative

The power of promulgating laws, traditionally vested in the king, was taken over by the prime minister during the Rana rule. The prime minister was not only the final authority to put his stamp of approval on the laws passed by *kausal*,⁵⁴ but almost invariably initiated the legislative proposals also. Since all laws were issued in the name of the king, *lal-mohar* of the king had also to be affixed in addition to the prime minister's stamp.

Prime Minister Jang Bahadur for the first time codified the civil and criminal law of Nepal after his return from England in 1851. He created a *kausal* which included senior members of the Rana family, the *Rajguru* and other important pandits well versed in traditional Hindu law, and important civil and military officers of the kingdom.⁵⁵ The prominent part played or perhaps the initiative taken by Jang Bahadur in the proceedings of this *kausal* is evident from a study of the copy of Jang Bahadur's original *ain*. The introduction to this *ain* clearly points out that Jang Bahadur "made" it. The list of the members of the *kausal* appended to this *ain* is headed by the name of Maharaja Jang Bahadur. Probably, Jang Bahadur presided over the meetings of this *kausal*.

The subsequent *kausals* consisted of fewer members⁵⁶ and were presided over by the commander-in-chief. But the initiative in legislation and final approval of the laws rested with the prime minister. The commander-in-chief acted as liaison between the prime minister and the *kausal*.

The British Resident made the following report about the working of the State Councils during the tenure of office of Prime Minister Bir Shamsheer as explained to him by the prime minister himself.

.. there were really two Councils, one to consider Military and the other Civil subjects. The members are taken, in the first instance, from the descendants of those persons whom Bhim Sen had made "noble" when he was Prime Minister; and these

⁵⁴*Kausal*, the Nepali corruption of "Council," was the body created first by Jang Bahadur and re-established off and on by subsequent prime ministers for making, repealing or amending laws. Details if necessary follow in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁵⁵Based on study of the original Jang Bahadur's *ain* (legal code) in the library of the Ministry of Law, Government of Nepal, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu.

⁵⁶An important Rana source.

are supplemented by any persons whom the present Minister may place on the Board. Sir Bir Shamsher seems to initiate all reforms or changes and explains these to the Commander-in-Chief who lays them before either the Civil or Military Council, as the case may demand. Should any measure not meet with the approval of Council, Commander-in-Chief informs the Minister of the causes of objection to it. The Minister then either alters the measure, or explains more fully to the Commander-in-Chief his reasons for still desiring to carry it through without change. These views are again placed before the Council, who appear to have no further power of rejection.⁵⁷

The reference to the Civil Council in this report is very likely a reference to the *kausal* discussed above.

Judicial

By virtue of the powers conferred on Jang Bahadur by the *lal-mohars* of 6 August 1856 and 28 June 1857, the Rana Prime Ministers could fine, imprison, put to death, or treat in whatever way they thought proper those who disobeyed them. The Rana Prime Minister, always a law unto himself, administered justice regardless of the declared law and independent of the established judicial structure of the country. He was in reality the highest court of the country having both original and appellate jurisdiction. In this capacity, he regularly held a sort of *darbar* at which he received from those present their *vinti patra*, i.e. petitions or complaints against the government departments, or appeals against the decisions of the lower courts. Cases were decided on the spot with the help of judicial officers like *dharamadhikar*, *dittha* or *bicharies*.⁵⁸ But those which needed some sort of enquiry were referred to the department concerned and decided later.

The Rana Prime Minister usually held two types of *darbars* to dispense justice. The one which he held for the common people was known as *salami*,⁵⁹ and the other which he held for the

⁵⁷Lieutenant Colonel H. Wylie, Resident, to the Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 8 June 1894, *Foreign Secret E* (July 1894) 173, para 7. NAI.

⁵⁸An important Rana source.

⁵⁹Acharya Collections, n. 8.

civil and military officers from the commander-in-chief downwards was known as *chakari*.⁶⁰ The practice seems to have varied as to whether both the darbars were held daily or each was held whenever required. A reference to *salami* is made by Major W.B. Northey in his account of Maharaja Juddha Shamsheer's rule (1932-46). The institution was very likely much the same in the period before 1901. Northey writes:

This morning salam has become an institution in the country having probably been imported from the custom of the Moslem Emperors of India, with which it has many points in common, and provides an opportunity for those who cannot do so through the ordinary channels to approach His Highness. Petitions, complaints and appeals, even against the decisions of the various heads of departments, and many things more are presented to him by the parties concerned in person. The usefulness of this custom in redressing many real grievances is so much in evidence as to preclude any possibility of dispensing with it.⁶¹

The institution of *chakari* is said to have been in existence in some form or the other since the time of Bhim Sen Thapa.⁶² But it became so harsh and tyrannical under the Ranas that the officers who absented themselves from it for long were likely to lose their jobs.

It has been reported by Laurence Oliphant who accompanied Prime Minister Jang Bahadur to Kathmandu on his return from England that Jang Bahadur while passing through the Tarai heard complaints of the peasantry about fraud and injustice of the officers and disposed of them on the spot.⁶³ Captain Cavenagh in his report on Nepal in Jang Bahadur's time refers to a practice according to which the local governor adjudicated on all civil and criminal offences in the Tarai, except those involving capital punishment which he referred to the minister.⁶⁴

⁶⁰An important Rana source.

⁶¹W.B. Northey, *The Land of the Gurkhas or the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal* (Cambridge, 1938) 87-8.

⁶²Acharya Collections, n. 8.

⁶³Laurence Oliphant, *Journey to Kathmandu, the Capital of Nepal* (London, 1852) 126.

⁶⁴Captain Cavenagh, n. 39, 17-8.

Financial

The Rana Prime Minister, in accordance with the totalitarian character of his office, had full control over the state finances. In fact, throughout the Rana rule, there was no clear line of demarcation between the state funds and the privy purse of the prime minister.⁶⁵ There was no system of framing a consolidated budget wherein attempts could be made to balance the receipts with the expenditure. Grants for expenditure from *kausi*, i.e. the central treasury, for payment of salaries or public works were made in an *ad hoc* manner from time to time. Discussions in this respect were held between the prime minister, the commander-in-chief and the heads of department but final decision was taken by the prime minister. Not a single penny could be spent out of the *kausi* without his sanction. Whatever remained in the *kausi* after meeting the yearly requirements of the state went into the pocket of the prime minister. It was normal for nearly all the Rana Prime Ministers to have easily about 25 to 30 per cent of the yearly state revenue for their purse.⁶⁶ This, however, was the chief recognised source of income of the prime minister, in addition to the revenue he got from the estates of Kaski and Lamjung. This revenue amounted to one lakh rupees per annum in 1856.⁶⁷

The prime minister was also the only authority to sanction expenditure from the *bhandar-khal dhukuti*⁶⁸—a special treasury receiving funds from all odd and irregular sources to be spent in

⁶⁵N.M. Buch (and others), *Report of the Nepal Administrative Reorganisation Committee* (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 1952) 57.

⁶⁶Based on data provided by important Rana sources. Also agrees with information given by Messrs. Chandra Bahadur Thapa and Nir Raj Rajbhandari, Auditor General and Deputy Auditor General respectively of Nepal in 1959.

⁶⁷See letter from Major G. Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 6 August 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (29 August 1856) 55, para 9. NAI.

⁶⁸According to Babu Ram Acharya, this treasury was created by King Rajendra Bikram Shah in about 1835 to save some money as reserve for emergencies lest Bhim Sen Thapa should spend all. An important Rana source described it as the creation of Jang Bahadur after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. According to this source, Jang Bahadur's exploits in India during the Rebellion in terms of cash and kind, valuables belonging to Nana Sahib, and income from similar other sources were added to it from time to time.

national emergencies. He was not entitled to draw upon this treasury for his personal expenditure. A duplicate key of this treasury always remained in the prime minister's house and his representative accompanied a representative each of the royal palace and the commander-in-chief to open this treasury whenever necessary.

The prime minister was usually exempt from the payment of customs on imports for personal use.⁶⁹ At times, the prime minister attempted to control the foreign trade of the country by imposing restrictions on it and monopolising it through his own agents.⁷⁰

Military

The Rana Prime Ministers, having the full title of "prime minister and commander-in-chief" and having inherited from Jang Bahadur the control of the military, became the real heads of the armed forces. The commander-in-chief, next to the prime minister on the roll of succession, was, however, the formal head of the army, his real function being to supervise the home and general administration. But in practice it was the commanding-general of the western districts, known as the senior commanding-general (or the *jangi lat* in Nepali) who functioned as the active head of the army on behalf of the prime minister. He was responsible for making all military appointments and promotions, for organisation of the army, and for granting leave to the army personnel, etc. But all appointments and promotions made by him were subject to the approval of the prime minister.⁷¹

The prime minister exercised control over the army in certain other ways also. He had directly under him his own regiments drawn from his estates of Kaski and Lamjung.⁷² He usually appointed his own trusted officers at strategic military headquarters like Birgang, Palpa and Doti. A tax known as *salami katta*, ranging

⁶⁹An important Rana source.

⁷⁰For further information about the Ranas' commercial policy, see Chapter 7.

⁷¹An important Rana source.

⁷²It is said that Jang Bahadur selected particularly these two provinces as his estates because they are the habitat of Gurungs and Magars, who have always formed the bulk of the Nepalese army. This ensured greater military control of the Rana Prime Minister. See also H. Kihara, *Peoples of Nepal Himalaya* (Kyoto, 1957) III, 79.

from one to forty rupees annually, was charged from all the civil and military officers and servants as their contribution to the pocket expense of the prime minister.⁷³

Prime Minister Jang Bahadur set up in 1874 twentytwo military posts in eastern and western Nepal. These posts were intended to organise militia in the whole of Nepal and to make ancillary arrangements.⁷⁴ Before the Nepal-Tibet War of 1856 and Nepal's help to the British in the Rebellion of 1857, Jang Bahadur had raised about thirtyfour regiments in addition to the existing sixteen. After the mutiny, Jang Bahadur kept in service thirtyfour regiments and cavalry and disbanded the rest.⁷⁵

General

The actual scope of activity of a Rana Prime Minister, however, extended beyond the specific functions mentioned above. It cannot, perhaps, be fully understood except in terms of his omnipotence and a complete merger of the state interests with his personal interests. He could do anything to satisfy his personal and political whims and to maintain himself in power. Nothing important in the state could be done without his approval. He was supreme not only in the political and governmental fields but also in social and religious spheres. Prime Minister Bir Shamsheer raised the status of the whole caste of *Kau* from *Sudras* to *Vaisyas* because he fell in love with a woman of that caste. Prime Minister Jang Bahadur ordered the murder of Lakhan Thapa II, a self-proclaimed incarnation of a previous saint of the same name, partly because his teachings were contrary to the prevailing orthodox creeds in Nepal and partly because of the popularity of this saint on account of his teachings of goodness and justice. He expelled Sant Gyan Dil Das for a similar offence in eastern Nepal.

The Rana Prime Minister was, thus, a key figure in the state and society, a despot to be feared and obeyed and never to be rivalled, a demigod controlling the very life and honour of the people.

⁷³An important Rana source.

⁷⁴Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 15; and Acharya Collections, n. 8.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

Administration

THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC of Nepal's administration has always been the concentration of power at the centre. At times, however, owing to lack of communications which ensure effective control by the centre, the district authorities tended to exercise power independently. The central government was strong particularly during the Rana period, because it was in this period that the prime minister emerged as the chief repository of power at the centre, at the cost of the traditional authority of the king. Further, the Rana period was marked by reforms in administration intended to modernise it and make it efficient and strict to suit the oligarchic and autocratic nature of the Rana rule.

The Rana administration inherited from pre-Rana times some features traceable to the Mughal administrative system in India. These features related to general structure of the central government, distribution of functions between various departments, nomenclature of the departments, legal terms in vogue at the courts, etc.¹

Besides, there was an essential similarity in some respects between the nature of the Mughal and the Rana administrative systems. Thus, the Rana administration was as autocratic and monolithic as the Mughal. The Rana Prime Minister, like the Mughal Emperor, was the source of all power. Both the Ranas and the Mughals owed their stability to the support of the armed forces. Under both the systems the state officials performed civil-cum-military functions. The object of the administration in both cases was to augment the power of the rulers rather than to promote the

¹Some of the departments common to the two courts were: *tosa khana* (king's household, wardrobe, etc.), *daftar* or *dafdar khana* (records room), etc. The legal terms commonly used were *tahvils* (cash balances), *siaha* (ledger or account book), *panja* (palm-print of the ruler with signatures, on letters, documents, etc.), *sanad* (a letter of appointment), *ain* (legal code), etc.

welfare of the people. Like that of the Mughals,² the scope of activity of the Rana Government, particularly during the period under study, hardly extended beyond the maintenance of the army and the collection of revenue.

Further, the British Government had some impact on the Rana administration. Jang Bahadur, after his visit to England in 1850-51, modified the administration in some of its aspects. For instance, the designations and ranks of officers in Nepali, such as *kaji*, *sardar*, *subedar*, etc., were replaced by English words, such as commander, general, lieutenant, colonel, etc.³ Improvements were also made in the training and organisation of the army. A significant step that he took to improve the administration after his return was to codify and modernise the Nepalese law. This was accomplished by the deliberations of a *kausal* whose creation was inspired by Jang's acquaintance with the British Parliament.⁴

²Writing about the Mughal State, Jadunath Sarkar says: "The State in those days ... contented itself with the police duties and revenue collection, and did not undertake any socialistic work, nor interfere with the lives of the villagers. ... The State refused to take the initiative in social progress, or the economic development of the people (as distinct from the domains of the Crown or *Khalsa Sharifa*, where it was like a private landlord), or the promotion of literature or art (except for the Emperor's personal gratification), or the improvement of communication (except for military purposes). All these things, where done at all, were done by private enterprise." Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration* (Calcutta, 1952) 12-3.

³Before Jang Bahadur, Bhim Sen Thapa had employed European designations during his army reorganisation under French officers. But these designations were abandoned after the fall of Bhim Sen Thapa by a *lal-mohar* in 1837. See Chittaranjan Nepali, *Bhim Sen Thapa ra Tatakalin Nepal* (Kathmandu, 2013 V.S.) 87 and 284-5. (Nepali.)

⁴The *kausal* which codified the Nepalese law was different in composition and functions from the British Parliament. But inasmuch as it was a large body of persons other than the king, its appointment and working was a departure from Nepalese tradition whereby the king was the sole lawgiver. The deliberations of the *kausal*, however, were at the initiative of and subject to the final approval of the Rana Prime Minister.

For the impact of the British Constitution on Jang's mind, see Kamal Dixit, ed., *Jang Bahadur ko Belait Yatra* (Kathmandu, 2014 V.S.) 23-30. (Nepali.)

Pre-Rana Administration

In the pre-Rana period, the king as the sole repository of power ruled with the assistance of a large number of civil and military officers. These officers, appointed by the king, were the instruments of the execution of his will. The number of officers, of course, increased with passage of time to meet the growing needs of administration. Gradually, however, the power and influence of the king waned,⁵ and ministers became more powerful. But, in principle, the king continued to be the supreme ruler.

The hierarchy of officers and servants in the administration at the beginning of 1845⁶ was as follows.

1. *Gurus*

The *gurus* or *rajgurus*, officially styled as *guru pandit raj sri ... pandit jyu*, were the highest functionaries in the realm. Their function was to advise the king on matters of Hindu law and to decide cases involving explanation or interpretation of the *dharmasastra*. The chief of them, traditionally called the *dharmadhikar*, functioned more or less as the chief judge for dealing with criminal cases. The *gurus* drew a salary between Rs. 4,500 and Rs. 6,400 per year, or enjoyed *salami*⁷ from three to four hundred soldiers, or were entitled to a charitable subscription, known as *dan*, collected at the rate of one anna per house. The *pajani* list of December 1844 puts the number of *gurus* at eight.

2. *Purohits*

The function of the *purohits* was to attend and perform royal

⁵See Chapter 3.

⁶This account is based on the *pajani* list of 1901 V.S., *Paus Badi 3* (corresponding to 27 December 1844), which contains all the appointments, dismissals, confirmations or suspensions in the civil and military personnel made that year, when Mathabar Singh Thapa was the *mukhtiyar*. This list was provided to the writer by Babu Ram Acharya, Kathmandu, from *Subba Buddhiman Singh's Vamsavali*, a well-known and reliable Nepali manuscript.

⁷This *salami* was a sort of tax levied on the soldiers by their master. The term *salami* is used here in a sense different from the one in which it is used in Chapter 4, though the institution in both cases implies a sort of obeisance to the boss. The rate of tax for the soldiers was, roughly, Re. 1 per year, and for *subedars*, Rs. 5 per year, there being 15 *subedars* over a company of nearly 100 soldiers.

ceremonials and rituals in accordance with the injunctions of religion. In this list, the number of *purohits* is put at four in the order of *mukhya purohit*, *acharya purohit*, *brahma purohit* and *ganesh purohit*. They were not entitled to any salary. But they received *dan*.

3. *Minister*

The minister, though the chief political executive of the king, stood in rank after the *gurus* and the *purohits*. In practice, however, the minister could effect the appointment or dismissal of all officers including *gurus* and *purohits*, depending upon the degree of his influence with the king.

4. *Chautarias*

The *chautarias* were royal collaterals and most of them functioned as governors of various districts.⁸ Being related to the king and in his confidence, they were usually put in charge of strategically important districts, e.g. Palpa, Salyana, Dailekh, Jumla and Doti. Each of them had under his command 400 to 1000 soldiers from whom he was entitled to *salami* in addition to official and personal services. Besides, they were usually granted *jagir*⁹ by the king. This list puts the number of *chautarias* at five.

5. *Kajis*

The *kajis* were senior members of noble families such as Shahs, Thapas, Pandes, Pants, Magar Ranas, etc. They functioned as governors or assistant governors of a district, cashiers or treasurers, *hakims* in some office, or administrators in charge of some palace

⁸For functions of the *chautarias* in earlier times, see Chapter 3.

⁹A *jagir* in Nepal generally meant merely a government employment, so that a person in government service was referred to as *jagire*, i.e. possessing a *jagir*. This originated from the fact that most of the government employees were paid their salaries in the form of a piece of land from which they enjoyed the produce or the revenue of a particular value during their term of office. But sometimes a part or whole of the salary was paid in cash also, and yet the employee was known as *jagire*. In such cases, the land (for the purpose of grain or revenue to be enjoyed from it) assigned to the employees either in lieu of the part-salary or in addition to the total cash salary was also known as *jagir*. Thus, the use of the term *jagir* in the following pages will mean either the total salary of a person in cash or kind, or the part-salary in kind.

affair. Depending upon their functions, they were given the command of some soldiers with their *salami* and services, or some fixed salary in addition to or in lieu of the *jagir*, the value of which varied from individual to individual. The number of *kajis* in this list has been mentioned as nine.

6. *Kapardar*

The *kapardar* was the officer in charge of the government jewellery and other valuable and civil stores, etc. Only a reliable noble was appointed to this office.

7. *Khazanchi*

The *khazanchi* was the chief treasurer of the government. Usually, a relation of the *purohit* was appointed to this office. According to Babu Ram Acharya, the *khazanchi* acted as the postmaster general also.

8. *Sardars*

The *sardars* who were drawn from the nobility occupied civil and military offices of importance. On the civil side, they held such offices as the auditor general, the chief justice, the officer in charge of arsenal, the officer in charge of medical department, or even the governor of some district. As military officers, they acted as commanders of some military posts or fortresses, like Sinduligarhi or Chisapanigarhi. Some of them headed companies of a few hundred soldiers each, depending on their ranks and functions. They got the usual *jagir* in addition to the *salami* and services which they obtained from the soldiers. This *pajani* list puts the number of *sardars* at twelve.

9. *Captains*

Captains, though bearing military titles, performed civil functions. They were governors of small districts, or in charge of some civil departments like "Elephants of the Tarai," etc. Their number was three according to this list.

10. *Mir Muns*

At that time there was one *Mir Muns* who was in charge of the Foreign Office which, therefore, was known as *muns khana*.

11. *Subbas*

The *subbas* were civil officers of rank performing varied functions at the capital or the district headquarters. Their number is put at six. At times they could be deputed to perform military functions also.

12. *Dvares*

They were the royal guards.

13. *Chobadars*

They were the royal attendants to perform any duty at the call of the royal personages.

14. *Vakil*

The Nepalese diplomatic envoys were known as *vakils*. Most of the members of this hierarchy of officers and servants assembled from time to time as the *bharadar* or the state council to perform advisory functions. In their individual capacity as officers there was no demarcation between civil and military personnel except with regard to the *gurus* and the *purohits*. Any officer could be deputed to perform any function. The usual form of payment was the conferment of *jagirs* from which they enjoyed the produce or the revenues as long as they held a particular post. Most of them, however, had under them some soldiers from whom they got *salami* or an annual charge, personal services, and official services for the administration of their respective areas.

Rana Administration

A characteristic that distinguished the Rana administration from the earlier ones was the existence of a powerful oligarchy hedged between the king at the top and the lesser civil and military officers at the bottom. This oligarchy comprised leading members of the Rana family who exercised real control over the king as well as on the administration. Within the oligarchy, each member was subservient to his immediate superior and all together were subservient to the prime minister. The prime minister was, thus, the ultimate authority in the kingdom.

As pointed out earlier, members of this oligarchy held military titles and performed civil functions also. The chief among them

were entrusted with specific military or civil functions such as the command of an area or a garrison or the headship of a department. Others were either given *ad hoc* assignments or required to stay at the capital, parade with the army, and wait for the prime minister's orders. Those who commanded the army or headed a civil department had under their supervision and guidance a number of military and civil officers running the administration. Although the state policy flowed from the prime minister personally, it was discussed and decided by senior members of this oligarchy from time to time.

The appointments of members of the Rana oligarchy took place automatically according to the roll of succession.¹⁰ These members usually numbered twenty to thirty and, being on the succession roll, were known as *rolwalas*. It was through them that the whole country felt the impact of the government because of the political, economic and social authority they wielded. Important members of this oligarchy, besides the prime minister, and their functions, powers and privileges were as follows.

*The Rana Oligarchy*¹¹

1. *Commander-in-Chief*.¹² Next to the prime minister, the commander-in-chief was the repository of the civil and military powers in the state. The person holding the office of the commander-in-chief was automatically supposed to succeed the prime minister after the latter's death. In course of time the commander-in-chief began to be called *mukhtiyar* also—the title by which the prime minister was known in the pre-Rana period.

The commander-in-chief as formal head of the army performed some functions such as inspection of the army, approval of appointments and recruitment of the officers and soldiers, planning the

¹⁰See Chapter 4.

¹¹This account is based on Gurujy Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalaya, Kathmandu); Acharya Collections (Babu Rani Acharya's personal collection of documents and inscriptions); Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, 1927 V.S.); interview with Sardar Gunj Man Singh, Kathmandu; and an important Rana source.

¹²While the prime minister's full title included "... Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Nepal," the title "Commander-in-Chief" when used alone referred only to the second man on the roll.

military policy, etc. As regards real control over the army, the senior commanding-general had more to do with it, though the commander-in-chief was equally responsible for ensuring the territorial integrity of the country. He, like the prime minister, led the army in war if the occasion demanded.¹³ However, the chief responsibility of the commander-in-chief lay in the field of civil administration. He was primarily the head of the civil administration, and as such he controlled and supervised the working of several departments—e.g. *muluki adda* (home and general), *kumari chok* (accounts and audit), *ain khana* and *kausal* (law), *kitab khana* (civil and military register), *muluki khana* and *kausi tosa khana* (treasury and expenditure)¹⁴—which were administered by civil officers like *kajis*, *sardars*, *mir subbas*, *subbas*, etc.

The commander-in-chief, like other officials, was granted a *jagir* which yielded him fifty to sixty thousand rupees annually. Guards, bodyguards and civil servants were attached to him at state expense. Often at the beginning of his career, the commander-in-chief was granted a lump sum of money to meet expenditure on initial establishment. He also enjoyed the privilege of free personal services of the new recruits for the first few days.

The commander-in-chief officiated as prime minister during his absence.

2. *Senior Commanding-General for the West.* The commanding-general of the western forces of Nepal was also known as the senior commanding-general because of the special nature of his responsibilities as compared to those of the other commanding-generals. He performed only military functions and was the real head of the army. His was a coveted post because it gave him an extraordinary control over the Nepalese army of which the western forces constituted a major part. The person holding this post

¹³Commander-in-Chief Bam Bahadur led the forces in war against Tibet in 1855-56 and Prime Minister Jang Bahadur led the Nepalese forces to help the British during the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58. See Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, *Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal* (Abhay Charan Mukerji, ed., Allahabad, 1909) 177-9 and 200-1, respectively.

¹⁴The commander-in-chief kept only a general check on the treasury about the regularity and correctness of accounts and records, etc., while the expenditure was sanctioned by the prime minister.

sometimes preferred it to the post of the commander-in-chief.¹⁵ The senior commanding-general was known as the *jangi lat* in Nepali.

He was in-charge of the defence of the country and of *jangi bando-bast*, i.e. military organisation. He made all appointments, promotions and recruitments of officers and soldiers, though subject to the approval of the commander-in-chief and the prime minister. Similarly, he recommended all military awards and titles, attended the parade and inspected the army, listened to reports, petitions and difficulties of the soldiers, and sanctioned them *birami*, i.e. sick leave.

He was granted *jagir* of the value of about fifty thousand rupees annually. The number of guards, bodyguards and civil servants attached to him at state expense was less than the number assigned to the commander-in-chief.

3. *Eastern, Southern and Northern Commanding-Generals.* The commanding-generals of the eastern, southern and northern forces performed civil functions also. Those who enjoyed the confidence of the prime minister and were regarded by him as able and influential men were entrusted with the charge of some civil departments such as posts and telegraphs, municipality, forests, etc. Their offices were usually located at their places of residence. As military commanders they performed the usual military functions.

Each of the three commanding-generals was granted *jagir* of the value of about forty thousand rupees annually. A number of guards, bodyguards and civil servants as required by their ranks and functions were attached to each of them.

4. *Generals, Lieutenant Generals, Major Generals, Colonels, and Lieutenant Colonels, etc.* The number of officers of each of these ranks put up on the succession roll by the ruling Rana varied from time to time. It depended on seniority in age, legitimacy (or illegitimacy) in terms of Rana lineage, and, of course, on political rivalries within the Rana family. These officers normally performed routine military functions of attending parades, providing and receiving salute at ceremonials and receptions, etc., besides

¹⁵Dhir Shamsher wanted to retain his position as the senior commanding-general and let Jagat Jang become the commander-in-chief when the existing commander-in-chief Jagat Shamsher died. See Chapter 4.

leading the troops in war. But they performed civil functions also and held charge of departments assigned to them by the prime minister regularly or on an *ad hoc* basis.

The annual value of *jagirs* received by these officers was roughly as follows:

- generals—Rs. 25,000
- lieutenant generals—Rs. 15,000
- major generals—Rs. 7,000
- colonels¹⁶—
- lieutenant colonels—Rs. 1,200

They were also entitled to have guards and bodyguards.

Members of the Rana oligarchy below the colonels were usually less important and considered too junior to require discussion individually. The Rana officers mentioned above carried on the administration with the assistance of a hierarchy of civil and military functionaries whose lists are as follows.

*Civil and Military Functionaries*¹⁷

Civil. The civil functionaries of all ranks were: 1. *Gurujyu*¹⁸

¹⁶The Rana source which gave the other figures did not mention the amount for the colonels. It should be noted that another valuable source, i.e. the civil register of the year 1915 V.S. (A.D. 1858) in the *kamyandari kitab khana*, Kathmandu, gives a different set of figures as the annual "pocket expenditure" sanctioned to the various Rana officers. The figures are as follows:

- commander-in-chief—Rs. 42,000
- senior commanding-generals—Rs. 24,531
- commanding-generals—Rs. 24,001 to Rs. 20,000
- generals—Rs. 24,001 to Rs. 8,696
- lieutenant generals—Rs. 16,118 to Rs. 11,796
- major generals—Rs. 8,828 to Rs. 6,000
- colonels—Rs. 6,000 to Rs. 3,961
- lieutenant colonels—Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 675

¹⁷This account is based on a section of Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 11. The section actually deals with the proportion at which the civil and military functionaries of all ranks were given presents by the Ranas or the royal family at ceremonial occasions. As such, the section contains in the hierarchical order the lists of civil and military functionaries at that time, i.e. about A.D. 1870.

¹⁸Full description of this *Gurujyu* as given in the *Ain* is: *Sri Panch Sarkar Mantra Sunaunya Gurujyu* (the Guru who chanted incantations for His Majesty, the King).

(Bada or Senior); 2. *Gurujyu*; 3. *Chautaria*; 4. *Kaji*; 5. *Purohit*; 6. *Khazanchi*; 7. *Sardar*; 8. *Kapardar*; 9. *Mir Subba*; 10. *Muluki Subba*; 11. *Subba*; 12. *Amir Muns*i; 13. *Subba Vaidya*; 14. *Nauso-Khanya Vaidya* (the *vaidya* drawing Rs. 900/- as annual salary); 15. *Dittha*; 16. *Vaidya*; 17. *Purana Purohit*; 18. *Dhoka Dvarya*; 19. *Mukhiya*; 20. *Bichari*; 21. *Chobadar*; 22. *Tahaviladar*; 23. *Nausinda*; 24. *Katuval*; 25. *Munsi*.

The details about the precise duties of these functionaries are not available. However, Captain Cavenagh in his report on the Government of Nepal published in 1874 has described the functions of some of them. The *gurujyu* or *rajguru*, according to him, was "an official whose rank and influence may be considered as second only to that of the Minister; in fact the latter even deems it politic to pay the greatest respect on all occasions to this dignitary of the church."¹⁹ The *kajis* had no special duties. They could be indiscriminately employed "either as judicial officers or as sirdars entrusted with the general superintendence of certain districts and having irregular troops under their command; they are all eligible to seats in the Grand Council...."²⁰ The *subbas* were fiscal officers attached to districts. The *ditthas* and *bicharis* performed judicial functions.

Military. The military functionaries of all ranks and positions including members of the Rana oligarchy were: 1. *Sri Tin Maharaj* (Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief); 2. Commander-in-Chief; 3. Commanding-General; 4. General; 5. Major General; 6. Commander Colonel; 7. Chief Colonel; 8. Lieutenant Colonel; 9. Major Captain; 10. Captain; 11. Major Adjutant; 12. Lieutenant; 13. *Kharidar*; 14. *Subedar Insayen*; 15. *Jamadar*; 16. *Rytar Adjutant Kote*; 17. *Lain Jamadar Sarajang*; 18. *Havaldar*; 19. *Amaladar*; 20. *Bahidar*; 21. *Sipahi*; 22. *Pipa Jamadar*; 23. *Pipa*; 24. *Khalasi Jamadar*; 25. *Khalasi*; 26. *Banadar Naikya*; 27. *Pipa Khalasi Havaldar*.

The details about the precise duties of these functionaries with the exception of those of the officers already discussed are not available.

¹⁹Captain Cavenagh, *Report on the State of Nepal, Its Government, Army and Resources* (Calcutta, 1874) 16.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

*Departments of Administration*²¹

The Rana system did not admit of an organised central secretariat where the various offices of administration could function in a coordinated manner. The administration was run through different departments known as *addas* or *khanas* which were located either at the residences of the prime minister and other senior Ranas on the roll or in different parts of the capital city depending upon the nature of work. The chief departments during the period under study were as follows.

1. *Muluki Adda* (Home and General). This department was under the commander-in-chief. It had vast jurisdiction over internal affairs. It recommended to the prime minister rules and regulations to govern the conduct of government servants and laws to be issued for the people. It also implemented these laws. It received petitions and appeals from the people and put them before the prime minister. It received reports from the districts about law and order, revenues, etc., and issued instructions to respective authorities. It supervised and controlled the collection of revenue and the maintenance of its records.

The work of this office, particularly that pertaining to revenue administration, was performed through two sub-offices, namely, *pahar bandobast* and *mades bandobast*, for the hills and the Tarai respectively. These sub-offices were created during the rule of Ranoddip Singh.²² They were located at Kathmandu and, being two sections of the *muluki adda*, were supervised by the commander-in-chief. They supervised the working of the *mal addas*, i.e. revenue offices, in their respective areas.

The *muluki adda* originated in the time of Jang Bahadur.²³ Its first *hakim* or executive head was a *muluki subba*.²⁴

2. *Jangi Adda* (Defence). The senior commanding-general or *jangi lat* was in charge of this department which worked as the army

²¹The account of the departments is based on Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11; Acharya Collections, n. 11; Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 11; interview with Sardar Medini Prasad Rajbhandari, Former Director, Tibetan Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu; interview with Field Marshal Rudra Shamsher, Kathmandu; and another important Rana source.

²²Rudra Shamsher, n. 21.

²³Rajbhandari, n. 21.

²⁴*Ibid.*

headquarters. It made recruitments, took roll call, issued parole orders, assigned troops for particular purposes, and sent guards and bodyguards for the officers. The appointments made by it were subject to the approval of the commander-in-chief. It framed rules and regulations for the conduct of the army.

This department was created by Prime Minister Jang Bahadur after his return from England.²⁵ Its executive head was usually a *subba*.

3. *Muluki Khana and Kausi Tosa Khana* (Treasury and Expenditure). These were allied departments which dealt with the receipt and expenditure of revenue. The *muluki khana* was the state treasury. The *kausi tosa khana* disbursed money. No money could be spent without the sanction of the prime minister. A general check or supervision over the *muluki khana* was maintained by the commander-in-chief.

The *muluki khana* was created by Jang Bahadur.²⁶ *Tosa khana* existed before the Ranas.²⁷ It came to be known as *kausi tosa khana* in the Rana period and, later, was briefly referred to as *kausi* only. A *khazanchi* and a *subba* together managed these two offices.

A mention may be made here of a special treasury known as *bhandar-khal dhukuti*²⁸ for funds for national emergencies. Expenditure out of these funds also could be sanctioned by the prime minister only.

4. *Kumari Chok* (Accounts and Audit). This office, under the general charge of the commander-in-chief, audited the government accounts. The central and district treasuries and other offices sent the statements of accounts to this office.

This office originated in the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah and continued to perform more or less the same functions.²⁹ Late in the Rana period, it was divided into a few sections. The Ranas are alleged to have developed the practice of destroying the records of this office after they were ten years old.

²⁵Rudra Shamsher, n. 21.

²⁶Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11; and Acharya Collections, n. 11.

²⁷Acharya Collections, n. 11.

²⁸For details about it, see Chapter 4, n. 68.

²⁹Acharya Collections, n. 11.

During Jang Bahadur's rule, the executive head of this office was a colonel, assisted by *subbas*, *khardars*, *mukhiyas*, *bahidars*, and *nausindas*.³⁰

5. *Munsi Khana* (Foreign). The prime minister was in charge of this office. Its functions included correspondence with foreign countries, mainly British India, Tibet and China, and the maintenance of related records. It was started in the time of Bhim Sen Thapa.³¹ Its first executive head was a *mir munsi* followed by a *kaji*. A section of the *munsi khana* dealing with Tibetan affairs was known as *jayasi kotha*.

6. *Kitab Khana* (Civil and Military Register). The commander-in-chief was in charge of this office also. Its function was to maintain a book or a register recording the names and emoluments of all the civil and military employees of the state. The lists included the names of all the employees from the prime minister down to the lowest of them, except only the king. No employee could get his salary unless his name was found registered in the *kitab khana* and unless an order or a certificate to that effect was issued by this office. This procedure was intended to avoid duplication or irregularity in payment and to ensure propriety in administration.

The *kitab khana* was set up by Jang Bahadur in 1848.³² It was also known as *kamyandari kitab khana*. Its executive head was usually a *subba* or a *kharidar*.

7. *Ain Khana and Kausal* (Law). They dealt with the codification, formulation, amendment or repeal of the Nepalese *ain*, i.e. law. Both of these were under the charge of the commander-in-chief. The *ain khana*, which could be compared to a modern law ministry, drafted the legislative measures and put them before the commander-in-chief. Such measures were mostly initiated by the prime minister or the commander-in-chief. The commander-in-chief discussed

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Different data were provided to the writer about the year in which this office was started. B.R. Acharya put it as A.D. 1825; Sardar M.P. Rajbhandari, n. 21, put it as 1890 V.S., corresponding to A.D. 1833; Shri Nepal Man Singh, *hakim, kamyandari kitab khana*, Kathmandu, put it as 1865 V.S., corresponding to A.D. 1808. It may be noted that Shri Nepal Man Singh is the grandson of *Mir Munsi Lakshmi Das*, the first executive head of this office.

³²Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11.

the drafts with the members of the *kausal* which, like a legislative council, was a deliberative body consisting of important officers of the state. After a measure was passed by the *kausal* it was sent to the prime minister for approval and was authenticated by his seal. The prime minister could send it back to the *kausal* with suggestions for modification, until he was satisfied.

The first *kausal* was created by Jang Bahadur in 1851 within about a month of his return from England.³³ This *kausal* codified the existing law and made new laws. Jang Bahadur's *ain* made in 1851-54 was the result of its deliberations. This *kausal* consisted of 230 members,³⁴ though the subsequent *kausals* constituted from time to time comprised less members.

The *ain khana* was set up by Jang Bahadur after promulgation of the *ain* of 1851-54. It was meant to be a standing body of legal experts to suggest amendments or make revisions in the *ain* from time to time. A judicial officer of the rank of *dittha* was the head of the *ain khana*. We find references to both the *ain khana* and the *kausal* in the introduction to Jang Bahadur's *ain*.³⁵

8. *Dharam Kachahari* (Anti-Corruption Court). This was a sort of special court established by Jang Bahadur in 1870.³⁶ Its purpose was to try cases of bribery, corruption, maladministration, violation of the law, and the like, involving officers of all ranks (including Ranas) from the prime minister downwards. According to Babu Ram Acharya, the noted Nepalese scholar, Jang Bahadur had a political motive in creating this court, namely, to downgrade his brothers by bringing false charges against them and to upgrade his sons.

This *kachahari* was headed by an officer of the rank of *subba*, and consisted of eleven members. It was dissolved by Prime Minister Ranoddip Singh in 1878.³⁷

³³Data from *Subba Buddhiman Singh's Vamsavali*, as a part of Acharya Collections, n. 11.

³⁴See list of members of the *kausal* appended to the introduction to the original copy of Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1910 V.S.). For further details about the first *kausal*, see Chapter 9.

³⁵Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1908-10 V.S.) (manuscript).

³⁶Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11.

³⁷*Ibid.*

9. *Miscellaneous.* Some other departments or offices of the administration were as follows.

(i) *Ilayachi Kothi.* It was a Nepalese consulate office at Patna (India), opened in the time of Bhim Sen Thapa.³⁸ It was also performing the function of import of cardamums (*ilayachi*) from Nepal to India during the time of Ranoddip Singh.

(ii) *Chaparasi Adda.* It was started before the Ranas for guarding the palace. Later, it performed the function of guarding the jail, and still later, in the Rana period, it supervised road-building because the prisoners then were employed to build roads.³⁹

(iii) *Shahar Saphai.* It was opened by Prime Minister Bir Shamsher to look after sanitation.⁴⁰

(iv) *Dafdar Khana.* It was opened before the Ranas to keep a record of *khanagi*, i.e. land, the revenue from which was given as salary to the government servants.⁴¹

(v) *Hajari Goswara.* It was opened in Prime Minister Bir Shamsher's time to take note of the attendance of government servants and to prepare reports about their work and send them to the commander-in-chief.⁴²

(vi) *Saraf Khana.* It was opened by Jang Bahadur⁴³ for the exchange of Nepalese money for foreign money.⁴⁴

(vii) *Top Khana.* It was started by Jang Bahadur⁴⁵ for keeping guns.

(viii) *Moth Tahvil.* It was opened in 1848⁴⁶ as one office, instead of the many which existed earlier, concerned with revenues.

(ix) *Tabela Dalan.* It was a special court created by Commander-in-Chief Bam Bahadur in 1850 to investigate and report cases of corruption by officers.⁴⁷

³⁸Rudra Shamsher, n. 21.

³⁹Acharya Collections, n. 11.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* At present this office forms a part of the Municipality.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11.

⁴⁴Acharya Collections, n. 11.

⁴⁵Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* The precise function of this office is not clear.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

(x) *Bajar Adda*. It was opened long before the advent of the Ranas as a customs office and continued to perform the same function.

Role of Army in Administration

During the greater part of the Rana rule, the army of Nepal performed several functions in addition to its own. As there was no regular police force till the beginning of the present century,⁴⁸ the army personnel served as guards and bodyguards to officers, maintained law and order and assisted the administration in the collection of revenue. According to a report on Nepal's administration submitted by some experts, "law and order was maintained with the help of the Army and the fear of the Ranas."⁴⁹ The contingents of soldiers attached to the district governors performed police functions also.

In his report about the Nepalese army prepared by Major Cavenagh after his visit to Nepal in 1851, he mentions that the army officers had some judicial powers in their respective *jagirs*. He says:

Officers receive duly signed commissions from the Rajah, and are thereby empowered to administer justice and award fines, not to exceed one hundred rupees, amongst the peasantry residing on the jagirs assigned for their support; as the fines thus levied are a perquisite of office, this privilege is doubtless occasionally abused.⁵⁰

Prerogatives of the Ranas

The Rana rulers were, no doubt, the members of a privileged oligarchy which by virtue of its position enjoyed certain rights and privileges denied to the common man.⁵¹ But some of the

⁴⁸N.M. Buch and others, *Report of the Nepal Administrative Reorganisation Committee* (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 1952) 95.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Quoted in Captain Thomas Smith, *Narrative of a Five Years Residence at Nepal* (London, 1852) II, Appendix B, 288-9.

⁵¹The common man in Nepal was referred to by the Ranas as *duniyadar* (of this world), to distinguish him from the rulers who presumably belonged to a superior world of special privileges.

privileges are said to have been derived from a special *ain* made by Jang Bahadur.⁵² This *ain* exempted the Ranas, in certain types of cases, from the jurisdiction of the common law. For instance, according to this *ain*, no Rana "on roll" could be punished for any civil or criminal offence and a Rana dismissed from service had to get his pay for the rest of the year. Further, anyone convicted of committing adultery with the wives of the king, of the prime minister, or of the *gurus* of the king and the prime minister could be sentenced to death.

District Administration

Little is known about the district administration of Nepal before the Gurkha conquest and in the few decades afterwards. Presumably, no significant changes were made in the conquered areas in the first few decades, the attention of the rulers having been devoted to further conquests. There were of course some nominal changes such as the appointment of *subbas*⁵³ or other officers in place of *rajas* who formerly ruled their principalities. Bhim Sen Thapa appears to have redrawn the political map of Nepal and organised the numerous formerly independent principalities into viable districts on the basis of population and revenue. A British official document,⁵⁴ in a statement of the population, revenues, and military force of Nepal in 1814, puts the number of districts of Nepal in that year at 39. Accounts of Jang Bahadur's rule (1846-77) make no significant reference to the district administration. However, important reforms in district administration were introduced by Bir Shamsher (1885-1901).⁵⁵ We come across an elaborate statement of the administrative division of Nepal

⁵²Babu Ram Acharya claims to have gone through this *ain* when it was being revised by Maharaja Chandra Shamsher (1901-29). This writer failed to get any documentary evidence of the existence of this *ain*.

⁵³Francis Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Edinburgh, 1819) 104-5. The powers of the *subbas* were, of course, less than those of the former *rajas*, particularly with regard to administering justice.

⁵⁴*Papers Respecting the Nepal War—1924* (Printed in conformity to the Resolution of the Court of Proprietors of East India Stock, of 3 March 1924) 36.

⁵⁵After Bir Shamsher, further reforms were brought about by Chandra Shamsher (1901-29).

into *jillas* and *tehsils* in British records of the time of Bir Shamsheer.

*Administrative Divisions*⁵⁶

The Tarai and the hills, the two parts which comprise the state of Nepal, did not have exactly identical administrations for their territorial units. In 1895, the Tarai was divided into 12 *jillas*, each being administered by a *subba* or a *hakim* later known as *bada hakim*. The hills or the mountainous country between the Siwalik range in the south and the Tibetan frontier in the north was divided into 23 *tehsils*. These *tehsils* were subdivided into *jillas* or *thums* or *daras* or *garkhas*, which were further split into *maujas* or *gaons*, i.e. villages. Although *tehsil* was the official term, the hill divisions were also referred to as *ilaka* or *jilla* by their inhabitants. The *tehsils* of Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan each consisted of a city and a number of *gaons*. The chief administrative officer of a *tehsil* was usually a *hakim*, at places known as governor.

Bir Shamsheer brought about some reorganisation in the Tarai divisions towards the end of his rule.⁵⁷ He grouped all the *jillas* into four circles,⁵⁸ each under a *bada hakim* with his office at the circle headquarters. The hill divisions continued more or less as before.

⁵⁶As given in the *List of Zillas, Tehsils, etc. in Nepal*, submitted by Col. H. Wylie, Resident, dated 8 August 1895, *Foreign External B* (March 1896) 89 A. NAI. It should be noted that the word "zilla," spelt so by Col. Wylie in this list, has been spelt in the text above as *jilla*, according to the Nepali pronunciation.

⁵⁷The year in which Bir Shamsheer reorganised the Tarai divisions is given differently as 1895, 1897 and 1898, by Chittaranjan Nepali, *Subba Hari Bahadur* (Legal Advisor to His Majesty's Government of Nepal, December 1959), and Babu Ram Acharya, respectively.

⁵⁸The circle headquarters were: 1. Hanumannagar, including *jillas* Morang and Saptari; 2. Birganj, including *jillas* Parsa, Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi and Mahotari; 3. Taulihawa, including *jillas* Butwal, Palhi and Dang; 4. Nepalganj, including *jillas* Banki, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. It may be noted that at this time the total number of *jillas* under four circles was 14, instead of 12 as reported in 1895. See Lt. Col. Eden Vansittart, *Gurkhas* (Calcutta, 1915), Appendix B, 183-6. Corroborated by Acharya Collections, n. 11, and the data given by Chittaranjan Nepali, Kathmandu.

*District Government*⁵⁹

The district government under the Ranas performed executive and judicial functions. Its executive functions which mainly included revenue administration and maintenance of law and order were as follows.

Revenue Administration. The revenue administration of Nepal remained almost the same from the time of Bhim Sen Thapa to that of Bir Shamsher who introduced some reforms. In the Tarai, up to the time of Bir Shamsher, an officer called *chaudhari* was responsible for the revenue collection of the whole *jilla*. The *chaudharis* performed this function with the assistance of *jimindars*⁶⁰ and *patvaris* who collected revenues from the various *maujas* or villages of the *jilla*. The revenues of the whole *jilla* were deposited in the *jilla* revenue office known as *mal adda* under the charge of the *subba* or *hakim* of the *jilla*. From the *mal addas* the revenues were transferred to the *muluki khana*, the central treasury at Kathmandu.

According to an account left by Dr. Daniel Wright, the *chaudharis*, in addition to their work of revenue collection, assisted ryots with loans to buy oxen, build huts, etc. They received 10 per cent commission on the revenue collections as their remuneration, and they extorted from the ryots interest at the rate of 20 to 25 per cent on the advances.⁶¹

In the time of Ranoddip Singh, an office known as *goswara*⁶² was established in each of the Tarai *jillas*. The *goswara* was the head office of the district government both for executive and judicial purposes. Its officer in charge was, to start with, a *hakim* who in the time⁶³ of Bir Shamsher came to be called *bada hakim*. The *bada hakim* also replaced the *chaudhari* whose office was abolished. The *jimindars* and *patvaris*, however, continued as rent collectors.

⁵⁹This account is based on data provided by: (i) *Subba Hari Bahadur*, n. 57; (ii) *Acharya Collections*, n. 11; (iii) *Chittaranjan Nepali*, n. 58; and (iv) *Rudra Shamsher*, n. 21.

⁶⁰The *jimindars* in Nepal, unlike in India, have always been revenue collectors rather than holders of land.

⁶¹Daniel Wright, *Sketch of the Portion of the Country of Nepal Open to Europeans* (Calcutta, 1872) 27-8.

⁶²*Goswara* is a Persian word meaning "abstract of accounts."

⁶³See n. 57 above.

In the hills, the district head office was known as *tehsil*, the officer in charge being a *hakim*⁶⁴ or a governor. According to Subba Hari Bahadur,⁶⁵ an officer of the rank of *kharadar* was usually the *hakim* of *tehsil* during Jang Bahadur's time. The *hakim* was assisted in revenue collection by subordinate functionaries known as *amalis* and *mukhiyas*. They collected revenue from the villages and deposited it in the *tehsil* from where it was transferred to the *muluki khana* at Kathmandu.

The *bada hakims* and *hakims* of the Tarai and the hill districts respectively were appointed by the Rana Prime Minister. The subordinate officials were appointed by the *hakims* themselves subject to the approval of the central government.⁶⁶

Law and Order. The development of a regular police system for the maintenance of law and order did not take place in Nepal till recent times. As stated earlier in this chapter, the army performed the police function also. The contingents of military guards⁶⁷ attached to district *hakims* protected the district treasury and helped the administration in collection of revenue and maintenance of order in the town. In villages, the work of detection and suppression of crime was left to the village *chaukidar* or *mukhiya*. The organisation of militia in the hills by Ranoddip Singh in 1878⁶⁸ also helped the work of maintaining law and order.

In British records of the times of Jang Bahadur and Bir Shamsher,⁶⁹ we find evidence of the existence of police *thanas* or *chaukis* at places in the Tarai along the British Indian frontier. But these police posts were hardly worth the name and were actually manned by military soldiers or sepoys. In a report submitted by a magistrate on special duty on crimes along Nepal-British India frontier during Jang Bahadur's time, the following observations were made regarding the Nepalese frontier police system:

⁶⁴The designation *bada hakim* was substituted for *hakim* in the hill districts in the time of Chandra Shamsher.

⁶⁵See n. 57 above.

⁶⁶Hari Bahadur, n. 57.

⁶⁷According to an important Rana source, these guards usually consisted of about 25 soldiers each.

⁶⁸Hemraj's *Vamsavali*, n. 11.

⁶⁹For Bir Shamsher's time, see *List of Zillas, Tehsils, etc. in Nepal*, n. 56.

First as regards the Nepalese territory, where, as I think, no police system deserving the name is in force. There seems to be no force set apart for police work in the plain lands of Nepal. The sole aim there seems to be a successful revenue administration, success being measured rather short-sightedly solely by the amount of revenue that can immediately be obtained. It seems not to be borne in mind that the contentment and prosperity of the subjects, on which the revenue must depend, are closely connected with the prompt and effectual suppression of crime. The chief duty of every Nepalese frontier official is to aid in the assessment and collection of the revenue. The only places at which a force of any kind is kept are the local treasuries; there a certain number of soldiers for purposes of escort and guard are retained. In addition to these, there is in each of the principal villages a sepoy as he is called, and he is placed there to support the persons charged with the collection of the revenue. No doubt, the sepoys at the treasuries and at the villages could be, and occasionally are employed by the Frontier Soubahs in matters relating to criminal administration, but there is no body of men set apart exclusively for the detection and arrest of offenders and the prevention of crime. I should mention that the Nepalese Commissioners spoke to me of Police Posts which, they said, existed at a few places named on the frontier in their territory, and of their willingness to increase the number of these. But I am inclined to think that what were called Police Posts to me are not what we should understand by that term. These so-called Police Posts are in reality merely detached cutcherries connected with the management and collection of the revenue.⁷⁰

Some Observations on the Administration

The normal concept of administration as an independent and permanent machinery devoted to the execution of policies formulated by the political heads did not develop in Nepal even during the Rana rule. Instead, the Rana administrative machinery was a mix-up

⁷⁰J.D. Gordon, Magistrate on Special Duty, to the Secretary to Government of Bengal, No. 2, dated Fort William, 11 April 1865, *Foreign Political A* (August 1865) 83, para 41. NAI.

of politicians and civil servants working in accordance with the dictates of the Rana Prime Minister. The tenure of office of political as well as civil personnel of administration depended on the whims of the ruling prime minister. Therefore, it is somewhat difficult to evaluate the Rana administration independently of the impact that the politics of the country had on it.

However, the Rana administration got a word of praise from quite a few visitors to Nepal. Lieutenant Colonel Wylie, Officiating British Resident, in the annual report on the administration of Nepal in 1897, commented:

... I am inclined to concur in the favourable opinion Colonel Henry Wylie has expressed in former reports of the administration of the country by the present Minister, Sir Bir Shamsher Jang, and of the prosperity of the inhabitants. In both these reports Nepal compares not unfavourably with the larger Native States in the plains of India. If not a very enlightened ruler, Sir Bir Shamsher is a strong and capable administrator, who enforces his authority and commands respect.⁷¹

Lieutenant Colonel W. Loch, the Resident in 1900, reporting the conditions in the previous year, said:

There have been no changes in the administration of the country, nor have there been any fresh taxes imposed that I am aware of. The people are particularly happy and contented, and pauperism seems unknown, even with a poor harvest such as that of last year.⁷²

The foregoing references to the prosperity and contentment of the people cannot be taken to mean a justification for or defence of the Rana government whose critical evaluation will be made in the concluding chapter. The scope of public activity of the Rana government, like that of the Mughals in India, was limited to defence,

⁷¹Lieutenant Colonel W.H.C. Wylie to the Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 17 June 1898, *Foreign Secret E* (August 1898) 238, para 2. NAI.

⁷²Lieutenant Colonel W. Loch to the Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 11 June 1900, *Foreign Secret E* (July 1900) 284, para 6. NAI.

revenue collection and maintenance of internal order. Within that scope, the Rana government was efficient and satisfactory to the people, particularly as compared with the governments of many other Indian states. Its efficiency could also be ascribed to the fact that it was the instrument of an autocratic regime based on the dictates and requirements of one person, the prime minister.

Law and Justice

THE RANAS MADE a major contribution to the development of Nepalese law particularly with regard to its codification as a written *ain*¹ and its reform. Whatever little was done in this respect before the Ranas is not known at present except through indirect sources.² For the first time in the history of Nepal, Jang Bahadur undertook the compilation of Nepalese law in one treatise. In this process of codification, the law underwent considerable reform. Jang Bahadur took this vital step towards modernisation of his country's administration as a result of his visit to England. He had planned this trip to know the sources of strength of the British political system which to his amazement had overpowered the powerful native rulers during the preceding hundred years. This trip enabled him to realise the tremendous difference in the political development of the advanced Western countries and Nepal, and intensified his desire to modernise the legal and political institutions of his country. After Jang Bahadur, Bir Shamsheer introduced further reforms in the legal code.³ Besides, a reorganisation of the judicial set-up of the country was also done in the time of Bir Shamsheer.

A characteristic feature of Nepalese law from ancient times to the end of the Rana rule was that political offences did not fall within the jurisdiction of common law. The law applicable to offences against the authority of a king or a prime minister was dictated by the whims of the ruler. This was particularly so during the Rana regime which, being the result of usurpation of power from the king

¹*Ain*, a Persian word adopted in Nepali, means a rule or law. The legal code of Nepal to the present day is known as *muluki ain*.

²References to earlier promulgations of the law have been found in later or secondary writings, the original texts being mostly untraceable.

³Nepal's *muluki ain* up to 1963 was mostly as it grew up to Bir Shamsheer's time with occasional modifications by Chandra Shamsheer (1901-29) and Juddha Shamsheer (1932-46).

and other noble families, was always apprehensive of hostile conspiracies.

Development of Nepalese Law

Before the Ranas

Nepal, like all oriental monarchies, was for ages governed by oral commands of the kings. Gradually, the customs of the community and principles laid down in Hindu *Sastras* came to the assistance of the rulers in laying down laws for the community. The first instances of the promulgation of a written law made on the recommendations of the people or the chief officers are found in the Licchavi period.⁴ Inscriptions of the time of Ganadeva (400 V.S.) and Sivadeva (500 V.S.) speak of a law laying down the powers of village panchayats.⁵ In later times, inscriptions of Handigaon give evidence of laws made by Amsuvarman relating to matters such as salary, allowances, charitable trusts, etc.⁶

In medieval times, Jayasthiti Malla (1389-1429) promulgated some laws about castes, land tenure, criminal offences and procedure, etc.⁷ The laws made by him were in accordance with the established usage and requirement of the time.⁸ The texts of these laws are untraceable. A reference to the law on land tenure is, however, found in the third part of Nepal's *muluki ain* of the time of Bir Shamsheer.⁹

In Gorkha, Ram Shah (1606-33) is said to have promulgated a code of about forty articles.¹⁰ It has been difficult to ascertain its details and know whether it was a civil or a criminal code or both.¹¹

⁴Dhundiraj Sharma, "Kanun ko Utpatti ra Vikas ko Ek Jhalak," *Nepal Kanun Patrika* (Nepal), 1, No. 2 (Chaitra 2015 V.S.) 12-3. (Nepali.)

⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

⁶*Ibid.* The dates of these Handigaon (spelt also as Harigaon in other sources) inscriptions as given by K.P. Jayaswal are A.D. 625 and 627. See his "Chronology and History of Nepal: 600 B.C.-A.D. 880," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* (Patna) 22, No. 3 (September 1936) 167-8.

⁷Leonhard Adam, "Criminal Law and Procedure in Nepal a Century Ago," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* (Ann Arbor, Michigan), 9, No. 2 (February 1950) 160.

⁸Sharma, n. 4, 13.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Adam, n. 7, 160.

It is important to note that the laws made so far, except those by Ram Shah, applied only to the valley which alone was Nepal until the Gurkha conquest. The hill tribes had been left to be ruled by their own customary laws. After the conquest of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah for the first time made laws applicable to territories beyond the valley. The texts of these laws also are untraceable. References to them are found in the *muluki ain*.¹²

Under the Ranas

The above account clearly suggests that considerable effort was still needed to make the Nepalese law an instrument of efficient and modern administration. Large and important parts of the law remained at a somewhat primitive level and the entire body of the law lay scattered, mostly in the form of customary law, and was only partly written. Jang Bahadur had on several occasions made known his intention of reforming the law as part of the effort towards modernisation of administration. This intention was given effect to after his return from England. The first and vital evidence of this was Jang Bahadur's insistence against the award of capital punishment to the chief conspirators¹³ against his own life.

¹²Sharma, n. 4, 13-4. As illustrations of Prithvi Narayan Shah's law, Dhundiraj Sharma in his article has quoted two sections (8 and 9) of the chapter on *Kagaj Janch ko* from the *muluki ain*.

¹³Prince Upendra Bikram Shah, the king's brother, General Badri Narsingh Jang's brother, and General Jai Bahadur, Jang's first cousin, were convicted of being the chief conspirators in a plot against Jang Bahadur's life, on his return from England in 1851. The state council which tried them unanimously sentenced them to death the only alternative punishment permitted being the deprivation of their eyesight. Jang Bahadur, desirous of sparing them either of these frightful punishments, requested the British Resident to keep them in custody somewhere in India, so that they were saved of the Nepalese wrath and were too far from Nepal to be a source of trouble to the Nepalese Government. The request was conveyed to the Government of India which in its reply to the Resident made some observations on Jang's inclinations to reform the law, as follows:

"The recent visit of Jang Bahadur to Europe ... has excited a reasonable hope that it might in due time produce its natural fruit by increasing civilisation and in tempering the ferocity and smoothing the rudeness of law and custom among the people....

"In connection with a different subject ... Jung Bahadur intimated to you his intention of amending the whole criminal law of Nepal proposing among other

Jang Bahadur's Pioneering Work. Within about a month of his return from England in 1851, Jang Bahadur set up a *kausal*¹⁴ to codify the law. This *kausal* consisted of 230 members. It was an important body comprising¹⁵ all the senior Ranas (brothers, sons and nephews of Jang Bahadur), the *rajgurus* including the chief of them—the *dharmadhikar*, the *chautarias*, and most of the civil and military officers of the kingdom, viz. *kajis*, captains, *vakils*,¹⁶ *subbas*, *amir munsis*,¹⁷ lieutenants, *ditthas*,¹⁸ *subedars*, *mukhiyas*, etc. It also included *vaidyas* and *gyotishis* to lend to the deliberations of the *kausal* the knowledge of medical science and astronomy respectively. The junior functionaries like *dwarya*, *daroga* and *chobadar* too were not unrepresented in the *kausal*.

The deliberations of the *kausal* continued for nearly three years, as borne out by the facts that the *kausal* was established early in 1851, and the date of promulgation of Jang Bahadur's *ain*, under the *lal-mohars* of King Surendra Bikram and Heir-Apparent Trailokya Bikram and the yellow *mohar* of ex-King Rajendra Bikram,¹⁹ is given as 1910 V.S., *Paus Sudi 7*,²⁰ corresponding to 6 January 1854.

In a preamble-like statement in the introduction to this *ain*, the object of the *ain* is stated as follows (abstract translation) :

Prior to this, officers in the various courts and offices of the country, while deciding cases, awarded different punishments to

things to abolish the punishment of death except for the most heinous crimes and to prohibit mutilation altogether." Letter from the Secretary, Government of India, to the Resident, dated Camp Wuzcerabad, 11 April 1851, *Foreign Secret Consulation* (25 April 1851) 12, paras 7 and 9 respectively. NAI.

¹⁴See Chapter 5, n. 34. Jang Bahadur returned from England on 6 February 1851.

¹⁵See list of members of the *kausal* appended to the introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1910 V.S.). (Original, Manuscript.)

¹⁶*Vakils* were Nepal's diplomatic envoys at Calcutta and Lhasa.

¹⁷*Amir Munsis* was executive head of the Foreign Office.

¹⁸*Ditthas* were judicial officers.

¹⁹Ex-King Rajendra Bikram used the yellow *mohar* because, when relinquishing Nepal's sovereignty and acquiescing in the accession of his son Surendra Bikram in August 1847, he had declared that in future, if occasion arose, he would use the yellow instead of *lal* (red) *mohar*. See Chapter 3, n. 30.

²⁰Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 15.

different persons for the same offences. There was no uniformity in that respect. Henceforth, to all the people, high and low, the punishment awarded must be uniform, in accordance with the crime and *caste of the person*; towards this end, the *ain* made by the *kausal* comprising *bharadars* as listed. ...²¹ (Emphasis added.)

Jang Bahadur's *ain* was, thus, primarily intended to bring about uniformity in the administration of justice for all classes of people. But, in spite of this advance in the growth of Nepalese law, the exception made with regard to "caste" is noteworthy, inasmuch as the provisions of law varied from one caste to another.

A statement of the object of this *ain* is also carried by the title page of a printed copy of this document, dated 1927 V.S. It reads: "Sri Tin Maharaj Jang Bahadur Rana, having started in 1908 V.S., made this *ain* so that the injustice done by the erstwhile *mukhtiyars* and *bharadars* in awarding different punishments to persons of different ranks for identical offences is not repeated henceforth."²²

All officers of the state were enjoined to adhere strictly to the provisions of this *ain*. The government servants guilty of contravening this *ain* were liable to be dismissed and fined Rs. 500 or imprisoned according to law.²³ Persons at the central or district courts found making unauthorised interference with the text of the *ain* were liable to be dismissed and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.²⁴

For the benefit and welfare of the people, the ministers and *bharadars* were called upon to suggest, from time to time, amendments in and additions to this *ain* to be adopted and promulgated with the prime minister's seal at yearly intervals.²⁵ Corrections or modifications in the text of the *ain* could be made only by the *dittha*

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Title page of Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1927 V.S.).

²³Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 15.

²⁴Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1908-10 V.S.) (manuscript).

²⁵Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 15.

of *ain khana*²⁶ on the recommendation of the prime minister in consultation with the *kausal*.²⁷

It is interesting to note that, at the end of the "Introduction" in the manuscript²⁸ of the original *ain*, the seal of Prime Minister Jang Bahadur and the seals of the following dignitaries are affixed: (i) Commander-in-Chief Ranoddip Singh; (ii) Western Commanding-General Jagat Shamsher; (iii) Eastern Commanding-General Dhira Shamsher; (iv) Gururaj Pandit Dharmadhikar Nagendra Raj Panditjyu; (v) Gururaj Pandit Dwij Raj Panditjyu; (vi) Subba Rudra Datt Panditjyu; (vii) Subba Narayan Datt Panditjyu. These seals are indicative of the fact that these dignitaries were witnesses to the promulgation of the *ain* and that they supported it.

Revision by Bir Shamsher. Jang Bahadur's *ain* was thoroughly revised in the time of Bir Shamsher. This seems to be one of his first major achievements. The date of promulgation of the revised *ain* as given in the introduction to a printed copy²⁹ of Chandra Shamsher's period is 1943 V.S., *Paus Badi* 1, corresponding to 11 December 1886—thirteen months after Bir Shamsher's accession. The main reasons which led to the revision, as given in the introduction were: first, that the original *ain* of 1910 V.S. was long, unwieldy, and "difficult to remember"; secondly, it contained repetitions; and, thirdly, parts of it had gone out of date and were not in consonance with the current usage and social and political requirements of the country. This revision gave it a compact and precise form, so much so that a cursory look at the revised copy indicates the drastic reduction in its size.

Merits of Jang's Ain. The promulgation of Jang Bahadur's *ain* is an important landmark in the development of Nepalese legal institutions from several points of view. It is the first up-to-date treatise of law made by a large body of councillors and applicable to the whole country. It is a thorough and comprehensive document intended to regulate almost all aspects of contemporary social life. The manuscript of the original *ain* runs into about

²⁶See Chapter 5.

²⁷Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 24.

²⁸Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 24.

²⁹*Nepal's Ain* (Library of the Ministry of Law, Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 1961 V.S.) (revised).

1,400 large size pages. The legislators endeavoured to leave nothing to the whims of the adjudicators. The *ain* regulates, of course, the routine matters such as religious endowments and charitable trusts, land tenures and land measurements, sale, purchase and exchange of property, civil and criminal procedure and punishments,³⁰ etc. But a noteworthy feature of the *ain* is the treatment of subjects peculiar to contemporary social and economic conditions. For instance, very detailed laws are laid down about the sale and purchase of slaves, sale of one's wife, sale of one's own body, etc.³¹ Further, it prescribes punishments for small personal or social offences, such as beating, abusing, showing one's naked body, spitting on others, etc.³² This *ain* is, thus, not only a manual of law, but also a mirror of contemporary social life.

The *ain* significantly reflects the social welfare policies of the state also. Some of the provisions of a chapter entitled *Garib-Kangal-ko*³³ (about the poor and destitutes) are:

Section 2 (Abstract Translation)

A girl whose parents are either dead or lost shall be looked after by the state. On coming of a marriageable age, the state shall make arrangements for her marriage according to caste, by collecting the required money from officers of *adalat*, *thana*, *kausi*, *tosa khana*, etc.

Section 5 (Abstract Translation)

A male or female, who is invalid, or destitute, or without any source of livelihood, shall be looked after by the *hakims* of the local *adalat* or *thana*, and be provided food by them, according to law, from some religious endowment. A *hakim*, if sued for failure to perform this duty, shall be fined Rs. 20. An endowment owner, if he refuses to abide by the order of the *hakim*, shall be fined Rs. 10 or imprisoned according to law in lieu of the fine.

³⁰Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 22.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

Similarly, some provisions^{33a} relating to the practice of *sati* (self-immolation in fire by a widow) are: (i) a woman below the age of sixteen cannot be forced to commit *sati*; (ii) a woman above the age of sixteen cannot be permitted to commit *sati* if she has a son below the age of sixteen; and (iii) a woman cannot be permitted to commit *sati* if she has a daughter below the age of five.

The *ain* also gives evidence of radical reforms introduced in the legal procedure. For instance, "trial by water ordeal"³⁴ was an important part of the civil and criminal procedure before Jang Bahadur. This was done away with by Section I of the chapter entitled *Dharambha-kaunya-ko ra Ninahalaunya-ko*³⁵ (serving an oath and dispensing justice) of the *ain*.

Peculiarities of the Ain. In spite of the reforms introduced by Jang Bahadur, the *ain* contained some peculiar provisions. Viewed from contemporary standards, the punishments prescribed were, in some cases, too severe for the offences. For instance, "Cow-killing is in the eye of the law as grave an offence as homicide, and is punished by death; and even the maiming of cows is severely dealt with, sometimes with imprisonment for life."³⁶ Similarly, "incest is punished by emasculation; adultery is generally revenged by the party offended against, who is allowed to vindicate his honour without the interference of the police; women for this offence are liable to have their lips and noses cut off...."³⁷ In these cases,

^{33a}*Ibid.*

³⁴"Trial by Ordeal" was an accepted part of the legal procedure of Hindus all over India. "When the evidence against a man accused of either a civil or a criminal offence is not sufficiently strong to convict him, the Hindus often have recourse to trial by ordeal, this method of settling doubtful cases being a regular part of their judicial system. The principal ordeals are those by scales and weights, by fire, by water, and by poison," although in all there are ten forms of such ordeals. A.J.A. Dubois and H.K. Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies* (Oxford, 1928) 717.

What prevailed in Nepal was trial by water ordeal, according to which, with due formalities or rituals, the parties to a dispute or two other persons of low caste in their name, were immersed in water in a tank, and one who emerged earlier was regarded as representing the guilty party.

³⁵Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 22.

³⁶Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, *Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal* (Abhay Charan Mukerji, ed., Allahabad, 1909) iv.

³⁷Captain Cavenagh, *Report on the State of Nepal, Its Government, Army and Resources* (Calcutta, 1874) 18-9.

Jang's *ain* recorded no improvement on the previous law.

The *ain* also made exceptions with regard to Brahmans and women, as follows:

No Brahman is ever punished with death, whatever his offences might be. He has his head shaved, all sorts of unclean things put into his mouth to contaminate his caste, and he is then taken to the frontiers and expelled from the country. Women also are never hanged; they are imprisoned, branded, outcasted, condemned to slavery, or banished, but never executed.³⁸

Even though the *ain* made important reforms in the legal procedure, such as abolition of "trial by ordeal," yet some crude practices of pre-Jang Bahadur days continued. Daniel Wright with his first-hand knowledge has explained these in the following manner:

When a charge is brought against a man, the accused has to prove his innocence, the Nepalese maxim apparently being that every man is guilty till he proves himself innocent. Witnesses summoned from a distance are brought under a police guard at their own expense—whatever their inconvenience or loss.

... Witnesses are brow-beaten and even imprisoned till all the depositions are made to correspond exactly; and the case having been decided, the culprit is threatened and imprisoned till he signs a confession that the sentence is a just one.³⁹

Crime and Punishment

Jang Bahadur's *ain*, no doubt, reduced the savagery and severity of punishments. The punishments like death and mutilation were henceforth less frequently awarded. Yet there are instances in Jang Bahadur's rule of brutal methods having been adopted for capital punishments. A brief study of crime and punishment may be made

³⁸P.J.B. Rana, n. 36, v. It is interesting to note that Tanka Prasad Acharya, a well-known political leader of Nepal, escaped death sentence because of being a Brahman in spite of his long record of conspiratorial activities against the Ranas.

³⁹Daniel Wright, *Sketch of the Portion of the Country of Nepal Open to the Europeans* (Calcutta, 1872) 18.

under four convenient heads: (i) crime against the state; (ii) crime against the person or private property; (iii) crime against the caste; and (iv) political offences.

Crime Against the State

Treason, rebellion and desertion in time of war were considered as serious crimes against the state and, according to Jang's *ain*, they were punishable by death or imprisonment for life. Bribery and peculation by government servants were punishable by imprisonment, fine or dismissal from office.⁴⁰ It is interesting to note how an offender could purchase his acquittal. As reported by Daniel Wright, "he may escape the imprisonment by paying the equivalent in money at the rate of rupees five per mensem."⁴¹

Jang's *ain* makes some improvement as far as punishment for theft is concerned. Before Jang Bahadur, the punishment for theft committed in the first instance was cutting off one hand, in the second instance the second hand and, in the third instance, death.⁴² But, under the new *ain*, theft in the first instance was punishable by flogging, in the second by amputation of the arm, and in the third by death.⁴³

Crime Against Person or Private Property

This category included crimes such as murder or killing of cows which were, under Jang's *ain*, punishable by death, and manslaughter or maiming of cows which were punishable by imprisonment for life. All other offences of this category were punished by imprisonment for various periods or fine.⁴⁴

In spite of the reforms in legal procedure, the brutality of methods of executing death sentences continued. For instance, a woman who had killed her son lest he should disclose to his father her illicit intercourse was put to trial. She made a confession and was sentenced to death. The method of execution was throwing her

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Answer to Question XCV, in B.H. Hodgson, "On the Law and Legal Practice of Nepal," *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects* (London, 1880) II, 211-36.

⁴³Cavenagh, n. 37, 18.

⁴⁴Wright, n. 39, 19.

to a tiger.⁴⁵

Crime Against the Caste

It is worth noting that questions of caste continued to receive great attention in Jang's *ain* also. It may be recalled that the introduction to Jang's *ain*, while laying down the object of the *ain*, points out that henceforth the punishment must be "uniform, in accordance with the crime and caste of the person...."⁴⁶ The general laws preserving the sanctity of caste were of the following type.

A low caste person who pretended to belong to a higher caste and induced a high caste person to partake of food or water that he had touched was liable to be heavily fined, or imprisoned, or deprived of his property. The victim of his deception could be readmitted to his caste on payment of certain fees to the priest and after the performance of certain fasts and ceremonies.⁴⁷

Should a high caste person willingly infringe the rules of his caste, he was to be excommunicated from his caste and could never be readmitted to it; besides, he was liable to be fined and imprisoned. Should he, however, choose to give up his caste, he was at liberty to do so by giving prior public notice of his intention.⁴⁸

Political Offences

Political offences, e.g. those intended to overthrow a king or a prime minister for reasons purely political, stood in a special category. Jang Bahadur's *ain* is not found making any reference to them. A study of Nepal's history, particularly of the Rana period, indicates that the chief punishments meted out to such offenders were execution, confiscation of property and exile. The punishment was awarded on trial or without it and its nature was determined on the basis of the status of the offender and the exigencies of power politics. In a conspiracy against Jang Bahadur's life immediately after his return from England, the chief offenders were Prince Upendra

⁴⁵P.J.B. Rana, n. 36, 166-7. This death sentence to a woman was one of the exceptions to the Nepalese law, as stated earlier, that women were exempted from death sentence.

⁴⁶Introduction to Jang Bahadur's *Ain*, n. 15.

⁴⁷Wright, n. 39, 19.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

Bikram, the king's younger brother, General Badri Narsingh and Colonel Jai Bahadur, Jang's brother and cousin respectively, and *Kaji* Karbir Khattri. The state council tried them and sentenced them to death. On Jang Bahadur's pleading for a milder punishment, the state council recommended the deprivation of their eyesight. But Jang Bahadur insisted on a still less rigorous punishment and only put them in the custody of the British government in India.⁴⁹

In a major conspiracy against the Rana rule, which was unearthed in January 1882, nearly all the families hostile to the Ranas—Thapas, Bistas, Basniats and Pandes—were involved. Their intention was to murder Prime Minister Ranoddip Singh and Commander-in-Chief Dhir Shamsher, to capture the throne and give it to Prince Narendra Bikram Shah, and to exterminate every member of the Rana family. Two prominent members of this family—Padam, Jang, third surviving son of Jang Bahadur, and Bambir Bikram, son of Bam Bahadur—were, however, implicated in the plot while a third, Jagat Jang, who was in India at that time, was also suspected of complicity. The plot was betrayed by Lieutenant Utter Dhoj Singh.⁵⁰ The punishments meted out to the conspirators were reported by the British Resident as follows:

The conspirators were punished with the utmost barbarity by Ranodip Singh and Dhere Shamshere.... Twenty-three persons were beheaded, some being sentenced to lose their lives by three, four or five blows of the kookri, according to the extent of their implication in the conspiracy. Prisoners were tortured to extort confession in the most savage and indiscriminate manner, and a reign of terror for the time prevailed. [All this happened, presumably, without any trials.] Five colonels were among those executed, the others being all military officers of lower ranks. As regards the treatment of the Prince and the two members of the Rana family, there was at first some indecision. Dhere Shamshere is said to have urged that Padam Jang and Bambir

⁴⁹P.J.B. Rana, n. 36, 155-61.

⁵⁰Lieutenant Utter Dhoj Singh was a grandson of Gagan Singh, the alleged paramour of Queen Lakshmi Devi of the kot-massacre fame. Utter Dhoj's father had revealed a similar conspiracy to Jang Bahadur in 1857.

Bikram should be put to death, and a vote was taken from the assembled sardars at Narain Hitti [the Palace] before whom the culprits were produced in chains. The unanimous opinion was in favour of capital punishment, when the Bari Maharani of Ranodip Singh came out on the balcony above and threw down a paper, by which the privilege of saving the life of a political criminal had been bestowed on her by the Crown. Upon this the meeting broke up. The eye-sight of the prisoners was next threatened.... Narendra Bikram Sah and Bambir Bikram Sah were eventually imprisoned, first at Chunar and afterwards at Ootacamund. Padam Jang was removed to Nyakote as a prisoner.⁵¹

Thus it is obvious that punishment against political offences was determined by political rather than legal considerations.

Some Nepalese scholars have been referring to the existence of a special law to deal with political offences in the Rana period. Such a law was known as *raj-kaj-ko ain*. According to Shambhu Prasad Gyavali, the well-known legal expert of Nepal, Prime Minister Bir Shamsher (1885-1901) promulgated this law and incorporated it in his revised *ain*.^{51a}

Administration of Justice

From the available accounts of the pre-Rana period, Nepal then had a rather inadequate machinery for the administration of justice. There were very few courts in the districts, and consequently most of the cases were taken to the central courts at the capital. Not much was done to reorganise the judicial structure of the country by Jang Bahadur and Ranoddip Singh. But Bir Shamsher took important steps in this direction. He not only established more courts to make the instruments of dispensation of justice available to the largest number of people, but also created appellate courts for groups of districts in the mofussil areas and at the capital.

⁵¹Colonel J.C. Berkeley, Officiating Resident, to H.M. Durand, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, *Foreign Secret E* (August 1886) 63, paras 21-22. NAI.

^{51a}Interview with Shambhu Prasad Gyavali, Attorney General, Government of Nepal, 22 June 1962.

People in the mofussils were thus spared the trouble of going to the capital for small cases. Gradually, attempts were also made to reduce the number of stages in the hierarchical set-up between the courts of first instance and the final court of appeal, i.e. the Rana Prime Minister. A brief survey of the judicial set-up of the country may be made as follows.

Before the Ranas

There were two sets of courts in the pre-Rana Nepal. As reported by B. H. Hodgson in his well-known essay, "On the Law and Legal Practice of Nepal,"⁵² the courts at the capital were called the Sadar Courts, and those in the mofussils were known as the Provincial Courts.

Sadar Courts. There were four such courts or *nyaya sabhas*, namely, *kot linga*, *inta chapli*, *taksar* and *dhansar*. The *kot linga*, being the highest, was at times called the Supreme Court and the other three were subject to its authority. The supreme judicial officer, i.e. the *dittha*, presided over this court. There was no territorial limit to the jurisdiction of these courts. A citizen of Nepal residing in the capital or the mofussils was permitted to move any of the courts, Sadar or Provincial, for civil or criminal cases. There was, however, a separate court each in the cities of Bhatgaon and Patan through which appeals to the Supreme Court at Kathmandu could be made. These courts could also send important cases directly to the Supreme Court.⁵³

All the four Sadar Courts were headed by one judicial official, the *dittha*, who, besides presiding over the Supreme Court, also directed or supervised through *bicharis* the decisions of other courts. To be appointed as a *dittha*, it was essential that the incumbent should be a person of high respectability and that he should have a thorough understanding of *nyaya* (justice) even if he had not read *Nyayasastra* (jurisprudence). There were two *bicharis* in each of the four courts. They interrogated the parties and ascertained the veracity of the facts of the case. The small cases in courts other than the *kot linga* were sometimes decided by the *bicharis* themselves.

⁵²See n. 42. This account of courts before the Ranas is mostly based on this essay.

⁵³Questions I, II, III and XVII, n. 42.

But important cases had to be referred to the *dittha* for his ruling. Other functionaries below the *bicharis* attached to each of the Sadar Courts were one *jamadar*, twentyfive *sipahis*, twentyfive *mahanias*, and five *chaparasis*. Their job was to serve summons and to see that the persons required were present at the trial.⁵⁴

Appeal against the decisions of the Sadar Courts could be made to the *bharadar*, i.e. the state council, which was presided over by the minister or *mukhtiyar*. The *bharadar* was assisted by the *dharmadhikar*, the *dittha* and the *bicharis*. The *dharmadhikar* was particularly called upon to consider cases in which the loss of caste had occurred by "negligence, inadvertence or licentiousness."⁵⁵

Provincial Courts. There does not seem to have been a uniform set-up of courts in the mofussil areas. As reported by Hodgson, there were two courts for the provinces west of the capital and two for those east of the capital. The judges of these courts were appointed by the *dittha* of the Sadar Courts. Appeal against the decisions of these Provincial Courts could be made to the Supreme Court at the capital.⁵⁶

The Viceroyalties of Palpa, Doti and Kirant had judicial establishments of their own. The judicial administration of districts outside the jurisdiction of the Sadar Court (Dud Kosi in the east and Trisuli in the west) was conducted by *bicharis* who were appointed by the king. There were eight *bicharis* for the western districts and four for the eastern districts. Appeal against the verdict of the *bicharis* could be made to the Supreme Court at the capital. Besides the *bicharis*, each assignee or *jagire* of superior grade exercised a "good deal of indefinite magisterial and judicial power" in the lands which were assigned to him by the state as remuneration. An appeal to the court of the adjacent *bichari* could be lodged against the decisions of these assignees and appeals against the *bicharis* could be made to the *dittha* of the Supreme Court at the capital.⁵⁷

Hodgson also reported the existence of *faujdars* appointed by the provincial governors to assist them not only in the administration

⁵⁴Questions XV, XXV, LXXXIX, n. 42.

⁵⁵Questions VI, VII and VIII, n. 42.

⁵⁶Questions XI and XII, n. 42.

⁵⁷Question XI, n. 42.

of justice but also in the transaction of other business. The appointment of the *faujدارs* had, however, to be ratified by the *darbar*.⁵⁸

*Under the Ranas*⁵⁹

Bir Shamsheer was the first Rana Prime Minister who undertook the reorganisation of the judiciary of the country in 1887 and modified it further in 1901. The subsequent prime ministers made important modifications in the judicial structure but they do not fall within the scope of this study.

The judicial structure as it emerged after the reorganisation of 1887 stood on five sets of courts. The first set of these courts operated throughout the country at the district level. These may be called the lower courts or the courts of first instance. The second set consisted of the first courts of appeal. The third set included the four *sadar adalats* at the capital which were in existence from pre-Rana days. At the fourth level a new court was created at the capital; it was known as *adalat goswara*. At the fifth level there was the final court of appeal of a Rana General on roll, along with the *bharadars* or the state council.⁶⁰

Lower Courts (first instance). There were twentyone of them in the country known as *aminis* and *adalats* in the Tarai and the hills respectively.

First Court of Appeal. There were three such courts known as *gauras* each having under it a number of lower courts for hearing appeals. Their jurisdiction was as given below.

These three *gauras* covered only twelve lower courts. The appeals against the decisions of the eight lower courts (besides the twelve mentioned above), viz. Majh Kirat, Sadar Patan, Sadar Bhatgaon,

⁵⁸Question XIV, n. 42.

⁵⁹Due to non-availability of more authentic or primary sources, the following short account of the development of courts in the Rana period under study is based on an unpublished M.A. thesis entitled "Administrative Set-up in Nepal," submitted by Jagdish Jha to Lucknow University in 1959. This information on judiciary was made available to Mr. Jha through the courtesy of Shri Bhagwati Prasad Singh, a former Chairman of Public Service Commission and a former Chief Justice of Nepal. It is based on records of the Law Ministry, Government of Nepal.

⁶⁰This, however, did not infringe the position of the Rana Prime Minister as the ultimate judicial authority of the land.

*First Court of Appeal**Lower Courts within its Jurisdiction*

1. Palpa Gaura

1. Salyan
2. Piuthan
3. Pokhara
4. Doti
5. Bhagwanpur
6. Taulihawa

2. Doti Gaura

7. Jumla
8. Dailekh
9. Banke
10. Kanchanpur

3. Dhankuta Gaura

11. Morang
12. Saptari

Palpa, Dhankuta, Jaleswar, Rautahat, and Bara, were made direct to the four *sadar adalats* at Kathmandu by omitting one stage in the hierarchy of courts. Similarly, the appeals against the decision of the lower court at Chitaur went directly to the *adalat goswara* at Kathmandu by omitting two stages in the hierarchy.

It is interesting to note that appeal against the decisions of Doti lower court could be made not to Doti *gaura* but to Palpa *gaura*, and appeals against the decisions of Palpa and Dhankuta lower courts could be made not to Palpa and Dhankuta *gauras* respectively but to the four *sadar adalats* at Kathmandu.

Four Sadar Adalats. These courts entertained appeals against the decisions of Palpa, Doti and Dhankuta *gauras* and against the decisions of the eight lower courts mentioned above. But, in addition to their appellate function, they had original jurisdiction to entertain cases in the first instance also.

Adalat Goswara. It had only appellate jurisdiction to hear appeals against the decisions of the four *sadar adalats* and against the judgement of the lower court at Chitaur.

A General with Bharadars. This was the last court of appeal against the judgement of the *adalat goswara*. A Rana General on roll was empowered to decide cases in consultation with the *bharadars* and his decision was conveyed to the commander-in-chief through the *muluki adda*.

In the absence of adequate data on the composition and working of these courts, it is difficult to assess the value and effectiveness of the judicial structure introduced by Bir Shamsher. But, in comparison to the pre-Rana set-up, its merits are obvious. It was certainly a much wider structure through which the judicial machinery was made accessible to nearly the entire population. It was much better organised and it also provided facilities for making appeals in successive stages. Unlike in the pre-Rana set-up, the jurisdiction of these courts was clearly defined.

Improvements in 1901. First, Bir Shamsher opened a few more *adalats* in the hills in 1901. Secondly, the name of *adalat goswara* at the fourth level of judicial hierarchy was changed into *apil adda*. And, thirdly, the power of hearing appeals as the final court of the country was transferred from a *general with bharadars* to the Rana Prime Minister who was virtually the final court even earlier. He at times decided cases even without the advice of the judicial officers.

Economic and Social Conditions

THE AUTHORITARIAN RANA REGIME was bound to have its impact on the economic and social life of the country. A brief survey¹ of the economic and social conditions of the Rana period is therefore essential to a fuller understanding of the nature of Rana polity.

Economic

The economy of Nepal was almost static from the beginning of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. The economic conditions under the Ranas were not much different from those prevailing in the pre-Rana period. During the Rana period, the economic growth was too meagre to attract the attention of the few visitors who were permitted to enter the country. Very little information is, therefore, available on this aspect of the Rana rule.

The Rana polity, being an oligarchic authoritarianism, did not conceive of the welfare of the people as part of the governmental activity. The rulers were most of the time preoccupied with the problem of preservation and augmentation of their political power. Therefore, most of the effort and money of the state was directed towards the benefit of the ruling class. A sizable share of the state revenue was appropriated by the Ranas and only the balance was left to be spent on the public.² Throughout their rule, the development of agriculture and industry was negligible. There was improvement in trade, though it served the interests of the rulers only. The state revenue showed little increase.³ Some of these aspects may be further examined.

¹Inadequacy of data does not permit a detailed study.

²It is estimated that the Rana Prime Minister alone appropriated to himself easily about 25 to 30 per cent of the total state revenue.

³The revenue of Nepal at different periods of Rana rule was, approximately, as follows. 1850: Rs. 1.5 crores (an important Rana source). 1908: Rs. 2.0 crores (Imperial Gazetteer, Oxford, 1908, XIX, 53). 1950: Rs. 3.0 crores (N.M. Buch and

Agriculture, the chief occupation of the Nepalese, made no progress. The methods of cultivation remained primitive. No effort seems to have been made to bring more land under cultivation. Consequently, the agricultural produce did not increase. There was a trend towards continuous rise in the prices of agricultural commodities,⁴ most probably because the supply of these commodities could not cope with the demand.

The traditional land system of *birta* was particularly exploited by the Ranas. Under this system, there was personal ownership of land as distinct from state ownership. The *birta* holder had either a right to possess the land or, as was more often the case, a

others, *Report of the Nepal Administrative Reorganisation Committee*, Government of India Ministry of External Affairs, 1952, 73).

According to Regmi Research Project, Kathmandu, the revenue figures for 1856-57 were as follows. Revenue: Rs. 3,073,502. Expenditure: Rs. 2,015,747. Surplus: Rs. 1,057,755.

⁴Daniel Wright gives an account of the rise in prices of twentyone agricultural commodities, the important of which were:

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Price per Nepal Rupee in 1836</i>	<i>Price per Nepal Rupee in 1871</i>
Krishna Bhoj (finest rice)	25 Mannas	17 Mannas
Malsee (coarse rice)	40 „	20 „
Dhan	80 „	42 „
Wheat	40 „	34 „
Barley	86 „	40 „
Mussoowah	80 „	40 „
Maize	72 „	44 „
Oord	30 „	22 „
Moong	25 „	12 „
Mussoor	40 „	18 „

NOTE: 1. "Manna" is a Nepalese unit of weight. 2. For lack of information, the period for which the prices have been compared in the above table is only thirtyfive years. But there seems to be no reason for the trend to have been otherwise in later years.

See Daniel Wright, *Sketch of the Portion of the Country of Nepal Open to Europeans* (Calcutta, 1872) 30.

right to retain the revenues accruing from that piece of land. In the past, the *birta* holders owed certain obligations to the state. For instance, they were supposed to supply the state with men and material during war as an expression of their loyalty to the ruler or his representative. But, during the Rana regime, the *birta* became known for the privileges that accompanied it, the most important of which was the exemption from tax. The Ranas gave a new form and meaning to this institution, making it more a privilege than an obligation. A new class of *birta* owners largely consisting of the ruling Ranas, their relatives and their favourites emerged. The owners of such lands collected arbitrary revenues from the tillers. In turn, most of them paid nothing and some of them paid a nominal amount to the state. Thus a large portion of the revenues went into the hands of those persons who owed little obligation to the state, causing heavy loss to the state exchequer. Besides, the tenants on *birta* land, though under statutory protection, were no better than serfs.⁵

During the Rana period, industry made little progress and, as was the case in the pre-Rana period, only cottage industries and handicrafts were in existence. In their attempt to keep the country immune to external liberal influences, the Ranas did not encourage the growth of new industry even when British assistance was offered for it. Consequently, the industrial product of Nepal in 1950 was the same as in 1850, or even in 1800.⁶

The trade of Nepal has always flowed in two directions—Tibet and India. In the Rana period, trade with Tibet did not show any progress, though trade with India made considerable improvement. But this improvement was due more to the efforts of the British Indian Government than those of the Government of Nepal. The British Residents from the time of B.H. Hodgson onwards had been consistently impressing on the Government of Nepal the necessity of removing restrictions on and providing facilities to the British Indian traders for the promotion of trade between the two countries.

⁵"Land Reforms in Nepal," *Hindu Weekly Review* (Madras), 10, No. 20 (15 May 1961) 11.

⁶The industrial product throughout was: coarse cotton cloth, woollen blankets, *daphne* paper, gold and silver ornaments, iron, copper and brass utensils and ornaments, cutlery, bells, spirituous liquors, salt and saltpetre, etc.

These restrictions were: the traders were not allowed to use normal trade routes but were forced to use some other routes or bazars; they were compelled to open shops in the frontier bazars and reside there for certain periods in the year; and they could not trade in certain articles in which the state held monopolies. As regards the facilities for the British Indian traders, in addition to the removal of the above restrictions, permission for the redress of grievances against their Nepalese counterparts in the Nepalese courts and uniformity in methods of levying customs duties, etc., were sought.

The Nepal-India trade recorded considerable improvement in the nineteenth century, as is evident from the following figures:

<i>Years</i>	<i>Volume of Trade</i>
1830-31	Rs. 30,00,000 ⁷
1890-91	Rs. 301,00,000 ⁸
1900-01	Rs. 399,00,000 ⁹

But this improvement did not benefit the country as a whole. A substantial portion of the profits accruing from increased foreign trade was pocketed by the Ranas who had established monopolies¹⁰

⁷B.H. Hodgson, "On the Commerce of Nepal," *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet, together with Further Papers on the Geography, Ethnology and Commerce of Those Countries* (London, 1874) Part II, 93.

⁸*Imperial Gazetteer*, n. 3, 52. W.W. Hunter, *Life of B.H. Hodgson* (London, 1896) 115, gives still higher figures for 1890-91, i.e. Rs. 330,00,000.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰The British records give detailed accounts of the way Jang Bahadur and other Ranas monopolised trade, either directly or through their agents, in important commodities of daily consumption like salt, oil, tobacco, dried fish, etc. The Ranas enjoyed profits from their sale at increased rates, causing at times near-famine scarcity in those articles. See, for instance, G. Ramsay, Resident, to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, Fort William, dated 27 October 1856, *Foreign Secret Consultation* (26 December 1856) 47, paras 2, 7, 11-16, NAI; and G. Ramsay to H.M. Durand, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 21 July 1864, *Foreign Political A* (October 1864) 63, para 3, NAI. This paragraph reads, "... the trade in tobacco has for some time past suffered by its having been put into the hands of that grasping but ingenious individual, Soobah Dhumnarain, who is permitted by the darbar to control, in the most mischievous manner, nearly the whole of the internal trade of the country ... the entire profits of the trade are

in the trade in important commodities. Thus the state exchequer was deprived of its revenue and the trading community of its profits. Besides, the goods imported by the prime minister and some senior Ranas for personal use were usually exempt from the customs.¹¹ This further deprived the state of some revenue.

This was in brief the state of economy in the Rana period. The agriculture was static, the industrial growth was negligible, the improvement in trade benefited only the ruling class, and the pattern of taxation was favourable to the rich and burdensome to the poor. All this increased the economic disparity between the rich—the Ranas and other landed classes, i.e. the *gurujyus* (Brahmans) and the *rajas* or feudal chiefs—and the poor (peasants, artisans and traders). There were no middle classes which normally would come into existence with the growth of industry.

Social

During the Rana rule, the society also, like the economy, remained static. Naturally, the one could not progress without the other. With the exception of a few scores of individuals, throughout the Rana period, the masses of Nepal continued to be passive, indifferent to politics (except at the end of the Rana period) and ignorant of what happened in the world. The socio-political stratification remained by and large the same as that before the Ranas. On the political plane, in the Rana period, the difference arose only at the top. The royalty was rendered ineffective. The traditional landed nobility was replaced by the new Rana aristocracy, although the Brahmans retained their former position and influence. At the lower levels, the soldiery and the peasantry remained as loyal and meek as ever. The social hierarchy underwent no change. The Brahmans or the priestly class, the economically strongest and

vested in himself, instead of being available to all who choose to embark in it." See also F. Henrey, Officiating Resident, to T.H. Thornton, Officiating Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 26 March 1877, *Foreign Political A* (May 1877) 61, paras 3 and 4. NAI.

¹¹Interview with Chandra Bahadur Thapa and Nir Raj Rajbhandari, Auditor General and Deputy Auditor General of Nepal, respectively, in December 1959.

socially indispensable class next to the Ranas, retained their supremacy. The Thakuris or the ruling class continued to occupy the next position. The originally non-Thakuri Ranas, however, forced themselves into the Thakuri ranks by inter-marriages. Following the Thakuris in the hierarchy were the fighting tribes (Magars and Gurungs), the Vaishyas (high-caste Newars), the Sudras (Limbus and Rais), the unclean castes (Murmis and Sunwars), and the untouchables.¹² This scheme of social hierarchy came into existence after the Gurkha conquest and remained so ever since.

An analysis of the attitude of the Ranas towards the development of education, literature, arts and culture and religion and towards social reforms will enable us to appreciate better the nature of the society during the Rana rule.

The arrangements for public education at the end of Jang Bahadur's rule (1877) were as inadequate and undeveloped as at the beginning of the century. Dr. Wright wrote as follows about the contemporary state of education: "The subject of schools and colleges in Nepal may be treated as briefly as that of snakes in Ireland. There are none."¹³ The prime minister and some rich families who could afford it employed European or Bengali tutors to teach English to their children. Other persons interested in education taught their children themselves or employed family priests or pundits. The lower classes had no facilities for education, since there was no public provision for it.

This state of affairs continued till Bir Shamsheer first opened the Darbar High School at Kathmandu in 1894. Deva Shamsheer, the liberal prime minister, attempted to introduce universal education and opened a large number of primary schools. His brothers considered this measure as premature and some of the schools were closed within a few months. The remaining ones were closed by Chandra Shamsheer after he became the prime minister.¹⁴ The attitude of Chandra Shamsheer and his conservative lieutenants

¹²Gopal Singh Nepali, "The Ethnic Groups of Nepal," *United Asia* (Bombay) 12, No. 4 (1960) 342. This scheme of social hierarchy of Nepal is as viewed by the dominant community, the Nepali speakers or Parbatias.

¹³Daniel Wright, *History of Nepal* (London, 1877; 2nd Indian edition, Calcutta. 1958) 18.

¹⁴D. R. Regmi, *A Century of Family Autocracy in Nepal* (Nepal, 1958) 128.

in this respect has been explained by Perceval Landon in his panegyric account of Chandra's rule in the following words:

... the first beginnings of education were looked upon with something of the mistrust with which the medieval church of Rome heard of the activity of scientists within her fold. We have seen that the present Maharaja [Chandra] began a new regime by sending some of the sons of the aristocracy to Japan [for technical education] in 1902.... In permitting the spread of knowledge he [Chandra] found opposed to him the traditional obscurantism or at least the jealous exclusiveness of a religion which had its roots deep not only in the minds but in the hearts of his countrymen.¹⁵

That the Ranas feared the introduction of liberal education is revealed by another statement of Landon in which he explained Chandra Shamsheer's measure of sending some of the sons of the aristocracy to Japan for technical education. Landon says: "It was thought that thus the advantages of modern science could be enjoyed by Nepal without the corresponding danger of the introduction of men imbued with Western principles of democracy."¹⁶

This hostility towards education entertained by the Ranas was natural and consistent with the requirement of maintaining themselves in power. In the course of a conversation with George V while on a visit to India in 1912, Chandra Shamsheer admitted that Nepal really lacked education and that one of its results was that there were no revolutionaries like Tilak and Gokhale in Nepal.¹⁷ It is said that Chandra Shamsheer while opening the Trichandra College at Kathmandu described it as the graveyard of the Rana rule.¹⁸ The extension of education was also discouraged by the aversion of the Ranas to giving employment to educated men.¹⁹ Consequently, young men instead of finding their way to the educational institutions started waiting on the Ranas for favours.

¹⁵Perceval Landon, *Nepal* (London, 1928) II, 179.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁷Kashi Prasad Srivastava, *Nepal ki Kahani* (Delhi, 1955) 107. (Hindi.)

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁹Regmi¹ n. 14, 26.

In literature, a work of outstanding quality and great importance in the first half of the Rana period was Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* (1853) in Nepali. This was the first publication which attempted to modernise the Nepali language and spread it through a popular medium. Due to its non-political character, the book did not offend the Ranas. On the contrary, the prime minister's younger brother, Krishna Bahadur, was so impressed by the literary ability of Bhanubhakta that he got him a job.

No other literary work of importance reflecting the state of contemporary politics or society was produced in the rest of the nineteenth century. However, Nepali literature became maturer in the early twentieth century and began to mirror the prevailing social and political conditions. Naturally, it invited the wrath of the rulers. Henceforth, the Ranas being increasingly fearful of the enlightenment of the people curbed their liberties ruthlessly. One of the first publications of the new era was *Nepali Siksa Darpan* (1912) written by Babu Ram Acharya. The book drew parallel weaknesses between the Rana government of Nepal and the Shogunate of Japan. All the available copies of the book were confiscated by the prime minister. Another important publication of that period was *Makai ki Kheti* (1914) by Krishna Lal. The book portrayed the miserable condition of the Nepalese peasantry who grew *makai* (maize) but did not get enough of it for themselves. The prime minister jailed not only the author but also those believed to have read the book. The suppression of all liberal and progressive literature was now the order.

The Rana rulers paid little attention to the development of art and culture. Fine arts develop only under the patronage of the ruling aristocracy. But, due to lack of education, the Ranas had no taste for or appreciation of fine arts, nor a spirit of nationalism which could inspire promotion of cultural activities. Their chief means of entertainment were wine and women. Some of them, privileged or interested enough, resorted to sports also, mainly hunting. On the whole, over-indulgence of the Rana aristocracy rendered them degenerate, mentally and physically. Whatever standards of art and culture prevailed in Nepal deteriorated in their times.

As regards religion, the policy of the Ranas was to preserve the

orthodox form of belief and worship and not to tolerate liberalisation. This policy seems to have been consistently pursued throughout the Rana period, though the motives may have been different in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, Jang Bahadur under the influence of the *rajguru* and other priests did not tolerate the propagation of any creed opposed to the established orthodox creed of Nepal. He ordered the murder of a saint called Lakhan Thapa II—a self-proclaimed incarnation of a previous saint of the same name—who was propagating a non-conformist creed named *Josmani* at Gorkha.²⁰ He ordered another saint, Sant Gyan Dil Das, to leave the country for having propagated a similar creed in eastern Nepal.²¹ But in the twentieth century, it was the anxiety to prevent enlightenment of the people which motivated the Ranas to take such action. Chandra Shamsher publicly whipped and exiled Madhavraj Joshi for being a follower of Swami Dayanand in 1909. Juddha Shamsher hanged Sukra Raj Sastri, Madhavraj's son, for attempting to propagate the principles of Arya Samaj in 1941.²²

In the field of social reforms, it is difficult to trace a uniform or consistent policy of the Ranas. Jang Bahadur, under the influence of his European tour, tried to discourage the practice of *sati* and placed several restrictions on it. But it was not completely abolished during his time. Even his maharanis committed *sati* at his death. The practice completely disappeared in Nepal only early in the twentieth century.

Jang Bahadur failed to take any strong action to abolish slavery which was heinous and widespread in those days. In fact, Jang Bahadur's *ain* contained detailed provisions regulating the sale and purchase of slaves, of their children, of the pregnant women slaves and their unborn children, and the working conditions of slaves, etc. Ranoddip Singh took some measures to abolish slavery within the valley. These measures were regarded as premature by the senior Ranas, and Chandra Shamsher withdrew them on

²⁰Acharya Collections; and Gurujy Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalaya, Kathmandu).

²¹Janak Lal Sharma, *Nepali Sant Gyan Dil Das ra unko Parampara* (unpublished). (Nepali.)

²²Regmi, n. 14, 19.

assuming the prime ministership in 1901. However, Chandra Shamsher later took effective steps for the amelioration of the conditions of slaves. This ultimately led to the abolition of slavery in 1924.

Polygamy as a part of the social system is still in practice in Nepal. In its origin, this institution is much older than the Rana rule, but it assumed an acute form as a social evil in the Rana period and led to unprecedented development of concubinage. It served the political purpose of the Ranas in that numerous wives of the leading Ranas drawn from royal and other noble families were important means of intelligence for the Ranas. The king's concubines who were chosen by the Ranas also served their interests by acting as their informers. The Rana palaces were built with the special consideration that they could accommodate their concubines whose number ran into hundreds.

Thus the social fabric of Nepal did not improve during the century of the Rana rule. People had neither the incentive nor the arrangements for acquiring education. There was no liberty of expression in art or literature. They could not free themselves of the clutches of religious orthodoxy and tradition. They were cut off from external influences of any kind.²³ They lived in a social milieu in which the values of equality and dignity of human beings were non-existent. There was disparity between the rulers and the ruled even as regards the exercise of ordinary civil rights and enjoyment of civic amenities. The common people could not use the same type of transport, or wear the clothes, play the music, or construct the houses to which the Ranas were entitled. Thus the Nepalese society in the mid-twentieth century lagged at least a hundred years behind many of the contemporary societies.

²³The traditional policy of exclusion of foreign influence from Nepal which so far meant a very restricted entry of foreigners was extended by Bir Shamsher to include a ban on the entry of Hindi newspapers into Nepal. See letter from H. Wylie to W. J. Cunningham, Foreign Secretary, dated 2 August 1897, *Foreign External B* (November 1897) 1. NAI.

Conclusion

THE RANA POLITICAL SYSTEM, unique in many ways, was the product of socio-political conditions in the pre-Rana period. Nepal towards the middle of the nineteenth century presented a woeful picture of disunity and anarchy. The monarchy had lost much of its influence, because for a long period the throne of Nepal was occupied by an unbroken line of minor and imbecile kings. The ministers ruled supreme, but at times even they depended for their survival on the patronage of the queen who dominated the king at a particular time or exercised decisive influence in ministerial appointments and dismissals. Bhim Sen Thapa who ruled for more than thirty years fell because he ceased to have a support of this kind after the death of Regent Tripura Sundari, the king's grandmother. The clan-based political factions always fought for power and the successful among them looked towards the British Resident for recognition and protection. The palace and the ruling nobility were ridden with intrigue and corruption. The life and property of the vanquished in politics were entirely at the mercy of the victors. The army was traditionally in the habit of supporting the victor, whoever it was. There was a series of murders involving ministers and chief ministers, instigated by one of the factions in the palace in alliance with an outside party. "The crisis of power" which had continued for some years assumed its worst manifestation in the kot-massacre. The massacre was an evidence of the virtual breakdown of the Nepalese polity and the utter failure of Nepal's ruling circles. Nearly all the political factions—Chautarias, Brahmans, Thapas, Pandes, and the king himself—had been tried and found incompetent to rule in a manner satisfactory to the various interests in the state. The country needed strong leadership and an alternative political arrangement to restore peace and order to the strife-ridden land and to build an enduring administrative structure. Jang Bahadur, triumphant in the kot-massacre, emerged as the man destined to

perform the historic role of restoring political stability and building a strong administration in Nepal. He did so by eliminating all opposition and by ruling despotically with the only help of his brothers. The political system initiated by him gradually got institutionalised into a family oligarchy ruling under the command of the seniormost male member. But the system, though initially advantageous to the country, grew dictatorial and corrupt with the passage of time. Ultimately, it became outmoded and succumbed to its own contradictions.

The king in the pre-Rana Nepal was *de jure* as well as *de facto* head of the government. As a result of the gradual loss of his influence, however, the ministers came to wield wide powers towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Yet he remained the *de jure* ruler of his kingdom. But, during the Rana period, the king was forced to alienate to his prime minister by means of *lal-mohars* complete sovereignty of two provinces of Nepal and nearly sovereign powers over the whole of Nepal including the right to coerce the king himself. The king was only a nominal head who performed formal functions such as holding darbars, signing legal instruments, receiving envoys, etc. His personal and political life was under the complete control and direction of the prime minister. Thus the king not only suffered a complete loss of *de facto* power, but also had to surrender his *de jure* power to a great extent. In short, during this period, the kingship remained in abeyance. Consequently, unlike the pre-Rana period, the politics of Nepal during this period was not subject to the whims of the imbecile kings or the impetuous queens. The prime minister, being the seniormost member of the ruling family, had the requisite experience and maturity with which he ruled unhindered. But the continuous absence of the restraining influence of the head of the state was partly responsible for the tyrannical character of the Rana rule which contained within itself the seeds of its destruction. Conspiracies and revolts against the Rana rule started as early as 1882. The kings or princes were active participants in most of these attempts.¹ In fact, the fall of the Ranas was ultimately brought

¹Although many attempts on the lives of the Rana Prime Ministers individually had been made earlier, often by members of the Rana family itself, an organised effort to exterminate the whole Rana family was made by all the dispossessed parties

about by a movement in which the king had played a significant role.²

The prime minister, known as *mukhtiyar* in the pre-Rana period, was not more than an executive head of the government during the major part of that period. Towards the close of that period, of course, he exercised wide powers, according as the influence of the kings waned. For instance, Bhim Sen Thapa ruled almost despotically ignoring at times the collective opinion of the whole *bharadar*. But he could function in that manner because of a particular type of political situation rather than because of any *de jure* powers possessed by him. The Rana Prime Minister, on the other hand, was much more than a mere executive head and that because of the *lal-mohars* secured by him. Besides being the supreme executive, he was the supreme legislative and judicial authority of the land and was also the sovereign of the two provinces of Kaski and Lamjung. In other words, in the Rana period, the prime minister was virtually the king of Nepal. His assumption of the title of *maharaja* (of Kaski and Lamjung) further helped him in creating in the minds of the people his image as a royal personage. The people gradually developed a dreadful reverence for him.

In spite of the omnipotent character of the Rana Prime Minister, the exercise of his powers was subject to certain limitations implicit in the very character of the Rana system. For instance, the very fact that the prime minister ruled by suppressing the king made him always uncertain of the king's attitude even when approached for the formal act of getting his red seal affixed on documents. There is mention in the British records that on some occasions the prime minister had to coerce or threaten the king to get his seal or signatures. Besides, the prime minister was always afraid of a

—Thapas, Pandes, Basniats, Bistas—for the first time in 1882. Prince Narendra Bikram Shah, younger brother of the late Heir-Apparent Trailokya Bikram, was also an active participant in this conspiracy and was to usurp the throne, had the conspiracy succeeded. See letter, J. C. Berkeley, Officiating Resident, to H. M. Durand, Secretary, Government of India, Foreign, dated 7 December 1885, *Foreign Secret E* (August 1886) 63, para 21. NAI.

²King Tribhuvan's role in the fall of the Ranas was almost decisive, for not only did he give material and moral support to the anti-Rana movement, but his

revolt or a conspiracy for the restoration of the powers of the king. He, therefore, kept strict control over the king's personal life and appointed his own agents to fill the household and office staff of the palace.

Similarly, the traditional importance and influence of the *rajguru* in Nepal's polity prevented the Rana Prime Minister from encroaching upon the age-old privileges of the Brahmins. Having antagonised nearly all other castes, the Ranas were constrained to keep in good humour at least the Brahmins. The Brahmins continued to get their *birta* (tax-free) and *guthi* (given to charitable institutions) lands and to enjoy exemption from capital punishment during the Rana rule.

The Ranas no doubt salvaged the ship of the Nepalese state when it was getting wrecked by the conflicts among the king, the queens, the heir-apparent and a host of political factions. By ruling despotically for a long period, the Ranas eliminated the various conflicting and vested interests, brought political stability and strengthened the administration. But in the process they perpetuated the domination of their own family in the government of Nepal to the continuous exclusion of the dispossessed castes or parties. This antagonised nearly all the important parties and powerful interests and gave birth to innumerable conspiracies against the Rana Prime Minister or the Rana system, ultimately leading to the fall of the Ranas in 1951.

The Rana administration had to discharge responsibilities heavier than those faced by any previous administration. It had not merely to implement the orders or policies of a government in medieval social and political conditions but also to sustain a well-knit and despotic regime being run by a few persons with control over the armed forces. It was more centralised and efficient than any pre-Rana administration. A distinguished feature of this administration was the existence of a Rana oligarchy comprising the senior members of the family who headed the various civil and military departments as direct representatives of the prime minister. The senior members, next to the prime minister, were:

flight to India in November 1950 was a signal to armed action against the Rana government.

the commander-in-chief, the senior commanding-general, the eastern, southern and northern commanding-generals, the generals, etc. This oligarchy including the prime minister's brothers, cousins, sons and nephews was the chief source of strength of the Rana system. Its members formed an impenetrable ring of security against any danger to the Rana rule, one acting as a spy on the other, and all together acting as spies for the Rana system. But the fact that all the departments of administration were monopolised by one family was a source of weakness too. The non-Rana elements who were deprived of their due share in the administration exploited every opportunity to strike at the Rana system. The first such occasion arose in January 1882 when there was an all-party conspiracy against the Ranas.

The appointments of the members of this oligarchy took place according to the roll of succession laid down by the prime minister. The system of roll had a definite advantage in that it minimised the chances of succession disputes. But, in the long run, the roll was used to serve the political interests of the prime minister. It was arbitrarily altered from time to time by the ruling prime minister in order to include his favourites or exclude his adversaries within the family, such alterations being often in contravention of the declared law of succession. The Rana members who were thus derolled or ousted nursed a grievance against the ruling clique until they got an opportunity to lend their moral and material support to any conspiracy against the Rana rule. It is remarkable that the derolled Ranas³ made a significant material contribution to the overthrow of the Ranas in 1951.

Another interesting feature of the Rana administration was the combination of civil and military functions in the same personnel. The members of the Rana oligarchy having military titles and commands performed civil functions also. The commander-in-chief was actually the head of the civil administration. He had only a formal military role. The real functions were performed by the senior commanding-general. The commanding-generals performed both civil and military functions. The generals were often the directors of various civil departments. The purpose of this

³Subarna Shamsher is prominent among the aggrieved Ranas who took a leading part in organising and financing the anti-Rana revolt of 1950-51.

combination of factions was stricter administrative control of the Ranas. But this rendered the Rana government more personal, despotic and, therefore, subject to criticism.

The institution of *pajani*—the traditional system of annual screening of all government servants and their appointment, dismissal or confirmation—was used by the Ranas to strengthen their administration. The power of *pajani* came into the hands of the prime minister along with other powers formerly belonging to the king, and the office of the prime minister was obviously exempted from its effect. Consequently, the first Rana Prime Minister used it effectively to rid the administration of all his adversaries and to bring in his own men. This ensured him a strong administrative base. But it institutionalised nepotism which became an integral part of the Rana system.

The Ranas made a significant contribution to the development of Nepalese law and judicial administration. The first Rana Prime Minister codified and reformed Nepal's civil and criminal law and procedure for the first time. This code was revised from time to time by the subsequent Ranas. The third Rana made valuable improvements in the judicial administration by creating more courts of original and appellate jurisdiction and by undertaking other measures to make justice quicker and available to the largest number of people. Thus the Rana judicial administration was a tremendous advance over the pre-Rana set-up. But in the dispensation of justice, as elsewhere, the whole Rana administration was subservient to the prime minister who was virtually above any law. He exercised unlimited judicial powers through institutions like *salami* and *chakari*—the darbars to give audience to the common people and the officers, respectively, for deciding cases as the final courts of appeal. These institutions were among the various instruments of the assertion of his omnipotence and despotism.

The social and economic life of Nepal suffered from arrested growth on account of the authoritarian regime. While the rest of the world was changing rapidly, Nepal remained in a backward state. Its people continued not only to live under the tyranny of an authoritarian political regime but also to suffer from the evils of the worst form of caste-hierarchy and feudal economy. It was a non-egalitarian socio-economic order in which the many toiled and sweated for the few who actually controlled the life of the people.

The post-Rana years of the history of Nepal afford an interesting example of a moribund socio-political order struggling to rejuvenate itself with the help of external influence and aid which so far were not available to it. There were numerous social, economic and political problems which Nepal faced during these years and is still facing. Most of these problems are the result of a contradiction between the legacy of the old order and the requirements of the new. The old order of a despotic oligarchy left behind certain social traits, economic conditions and political habits which were absolutely unsuitable to the building of a new, liberal and democratic order. Consequently, the struggle for building up the new order has continued to be painful, involving rapid change of governments and new political experiments. Some of the elements of the legacy of the old order may be examined here.

A significant trait of the Nepalese character which strikes a keen observer of the post-Rana society is the lack of initiative and enterprise among the rank and file of the people. The rank of the people seem to be too dependent on the favours of the high authorities, and seek distinctions, appointments and promotions by continuous calling and waiting on their seniors rather than by personal merit. In this respect, Nepal perhaps has a lot in common with other developing countries. But within Nepal this trait of character is clearly traceable to the Rana institutions of *chakari*, *salami* and *pajani*. The first two of these were apparently semi-judicial institutions where appeals were heard and decided. But they were also the means of testing the loyalty of the officers and the subjects to the ruling prime minister who expected them to attend these gatherings regularly. Frequent absentees were likely to lose the favour of the prime minister, and consequently their job or seniority. This relationship was established between all the officers and their subordinates. The people thus acquired the habit of relying more on favours than on hard work, and this habit was inherited by the post-Rana society.

The institution of *pajani* which effectively served the Rana interests continued to be misused even after the Ranas. Nearly every government in the post-Rana period resorted to *pajani* to have its own men in the administration and to dismiss those who were politically opposed to it. Consequently, the installation of a new government was followed by a swelling of the ranks of the administrative

personnel. This continuously increased the burden on the state exchequer. Again, it perpetuated the habit of the people to manoeuvre for jobs and led to frequent changes of personnel even in the permanent administrative staff. Thus the administration retained a largely feudal character in the so-called modern democratic phase of the country's history.

As regards economic conditions, the general poverty of the country and the extreme disparity in the economic levels of a few scores of families on the one hand and the rest of the nation on the other was a legacy of the Rana rule. The conditions before the Ranas might not have been much different in this respect, but the Ranas did little to improve them. The most important economic problem of the post-Rana period was that of land, the revenue from which forms the largest part of the country's income. The greatest evil pertaining to land is the *birta* system which acquired its present corrupt and socially harmful form in the Rana period. The *birta* implies not only social and economic exploitation by the *birta* holders but also a serious loss of revenue to the state exchequer. The system became such an integral part of the body politic that its abolition needed a fight on both the social and political planes. But the vested interests which survived the overthrow of the Rana government made its abolition difficult in the post-Rana years. The legislative efforts made by some governments were hindered on the social plane by the landed interests so much so that the *birta* holders did not supply the government with even the correct figures about their holdings.

Another serious difficulty of the post-Rana period which directly affected economic planning was the lack of records and statistics about the economic life of the country. This again is a legacy partly of the Rana system, though perhaps the problem is common to other developing countries also. The Ranas who regarded the country as a personal estate were generally averse to keeping any record of the income and expenditure of the state. If, however, some estimates were recorded, most of them, it is alleged, were destroyed after ten years. Whatever records have survived may be of limited value to the modern planners because of their inadequacy or lopsidedness. Consequently, the economic planners had almost nothing to start building on. This hindered the development of the country.

In the political field, again, the complexities of the post-Rana years have their origin in the Rana period. This period of one hundred and five years, from the viewpoint of the political growth of the country as measured by contemporary standards, will be regarded more or less as a dead period. The form of government remained extremely centralised and totalitarian up to the end. There was no popular participation in the processes of government. The absence of educational and social development and the absolute lack of industrial growth prevented the rise of an enlightened middle class trained in or even acquainted with democratic institutions. Consequently, in the post-Rana years, the political activity which was directed towards building up a democratic structure was without a base which such a middle class normally provides. That largely explains the political instability and the rapid fall of successive governments during this period.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Kings, Regents, and Prime Ministers after 1769

Kings

Prithvi Narayan Shah, 1769-1775
Pratap Singh Shah, 1775-1778
Ran Bahadur Shah, 1778-1799
Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah, 1799-1816
Rajendra Bikram Shah, 1816-1847
Surendra Bikram Shah, 1847-1881
Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, 1881-1911

Regents

Queen Rajendra Lakshmi Devi, 1778-1785
Bahadur Shah, 1785-1794
Queen Raj Rajeshwari Devi, 1799-1800
Queen Suvarna Prabha, 1800-1803
Queen Raj Rajeshwari Devi, 1803-1804
Queen Lalit Tripura Sundari, 1806-1832

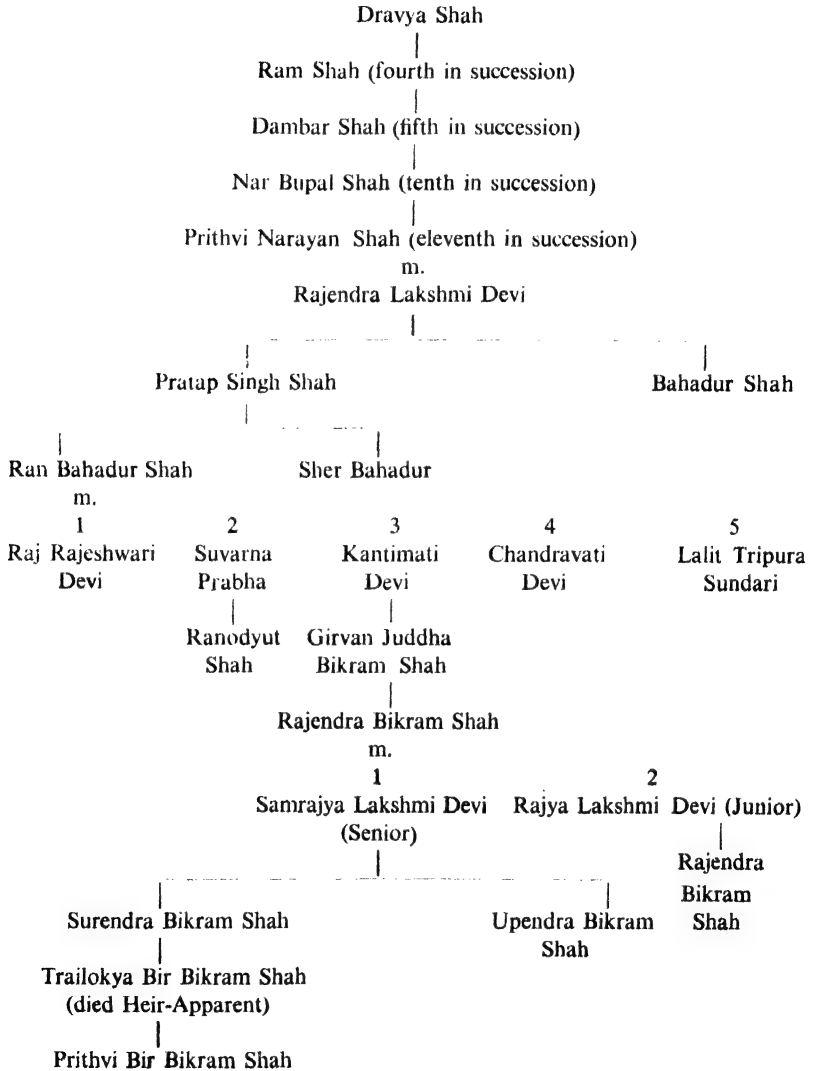
Prime Ministers (known as Mukhtiyars in the pre-Rana period)

Damodar Pande, 1800-1804
Ran Bahadur Shah, 1804-1806
Bhim Sen Thapa, 1806-1837
Ran Jang Pande, 1837 (July-August)
Ranganath Pandit, 1837-1838
Pushkar Shah Chautaria (and Ran Jang Pande), 1838-1839
Ran Jang Pande (and Pushkar Shah Chautaria), 1839-1840
Ran Jang Pande, 1840 (February-November)
Coalition led by Fateh Jang Chautaria, 1840-1843
Mathabar Singh Thapa, 1843-1845
Coalition led by Fateh Jang Chautaria, 1845-1846
Jang Bahadur, 1846-1856
Bam Bahadur, 1856-1857
Jang Bahadur, 1857-1877
Ranoddip Singh, 1877-1885
Bir Shamsher, 1885-1901
Dev Shamsher, 1901 (March-June)
Chandra Shamsher, 1901-1929

Appendix 2

Tables

I GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY*



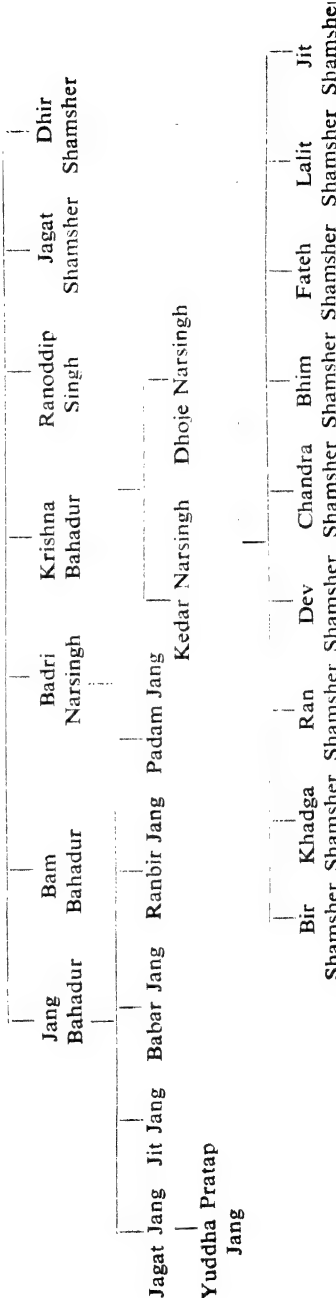
*This chart includes only those members of the royal family whose names have occurred in the book.

Ahram Kunwar

Ram Krishna Kunwar

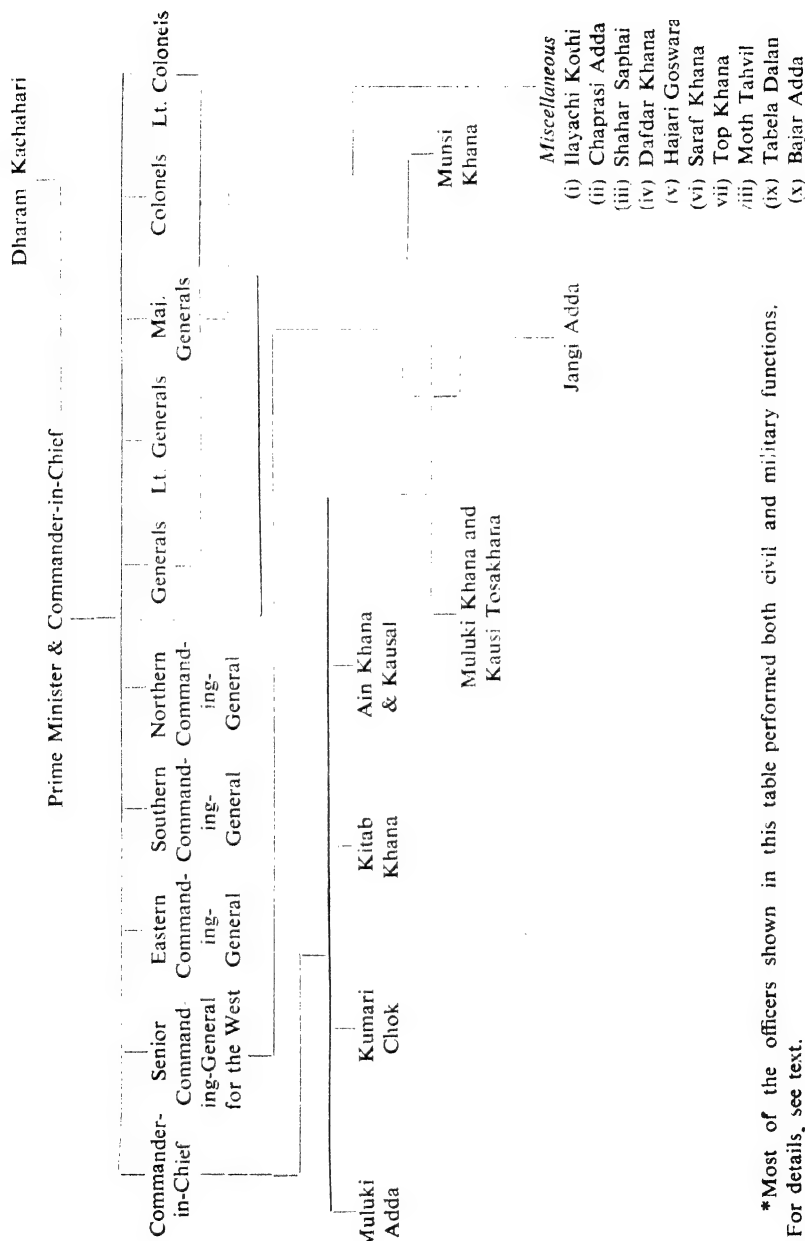
Raniit Kunwar

Bal Narsingh Kunwar



*This table includes only those members of the Rana family whose names have occurred in the main body of the book.

III RANA ADMINISTRATION*



*Most of the officers shown in this table performed both civil and military functions. For details, see text.

Appendix 3

Some Important Lal-Mohars

Abstract translation of the Lal-Mohar granted by King Surendra Bikram Shah of Nepal to Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Jang Bahadur entitling him and his brothers and descendants to call themselves Ranas, dated 1905 V.S., Baisakh Sudi 13, corresponding to 5 May 1849.*

You saved my life and the life of my father and younger brother, and maintained the dignity and respect of our Queens; you killed or expelled the traitors and kept intact the traditions and usages of the country; as a reward for all this, you got nothing except the powers of *Mukhtiyar* and the title of Commander-in-Chief for yourself, and the ranks of Generals and Colonels for your brothers, from my “younger mother” [step-mother—Junior Queen of Rajendra Bikram Shah]. My mother [Senior Queen of Rajendra Bikram Shah] had taken to hermitage so that I acceded to the throne of Nepal. My father had promised in the Guhayeshwari temple to the effect that I accede to the throne at the age of sixteen. As a prelude to the fulfilment of this my mother left [for Banaras], but as soon as she reached the river Karra, she died of a fever [a malarial fever]. My desire could not be fulfilled. Afterwards, Mathabar Singh Thapa, in accordance with my instructions, killed sixteen persons at Dhukuvavas. But even he could not get me the throne, although, as a reward for the pleasure he caused me, I granted him land producing grain worth Rs. one lakh and a quarter and gave him Rs. two lakhs as *khillat*. You saved our lives and ensured the security and authority of the throne and, therefore, no reward was sufficient for you. Even so, when offered a *khillat* equivalent to that given to Mathabar Singh Thapa, you declined it by saying that whatever you possess is already given by us and that you are happy without it. Since you requested us not to give you this *khillat*, I hereby grant you as follows:

Among your ancestors, one brother was ruling Chittaurgarh, while the other three brothers, not seeing good prospects there, proceeded towards the hills. One of them became the Raja of Taklakhar [a place in the north-west of Nepal, now in Tibet], another went to reside in Jumla, and the offsprings of the third in later times settled in Kaski. Your great great-grandfather, Ahiram Kunwar, came and lived in Gorkha in the time of our ancestor Nar Bhupal Shah, and [your ancestors] were called Kunwars till the present day. Now, [since] I am pleased with you, it seems to me that you and your ancestors have been Kunwar Ranaji. Today again, I confer on you the caste of Rana. Besides, with the exception of ourselves in the interest of our life, throne and country, people taking another's life are liable to death sentence. But you Kunwar Ranas, for committing such acts, are exempted from death sentence. Instead, you are liable to be degraded of your caste, deprived of your property or exiled. You can enter into matrimonial alliances with Rajput families of your choice with the exception of those Rajput families in the Hills and the Tarai with whom

*Nepali text from Chittaranjan Nepali, Kathmandu.

we have marital relations. You will act according to the traditional customs and usages of the Rajputs. Being pleased with you, I hereby grant you the above title and privileges. One who does not abide by the above will suffer the consequences of having committed "five great sins" and of the evil eyes of god Pasupatinath and goddess Guhayeshwari. One who abides by the above will enjoy the blessings of these gods.

II

Abstract translation of the Lal-Mohar granted by King Surendra Bikram Shah of Nepal to Jang Bahadur conferring on him the sovereignty of Kaski and Lamjung and the title of Maharaja, dated 1913 V.S., Sravan Sudi 6, corresponding to 6 August 1856.*

I am pleased with you for following reasons:

1. You secured to me the throne of Nepal by killing those persons who were helping the Junior Queen of Rajendra Bikram Shah (who had earlier given her the sovereign powers) in her designs of putting her own son on the throne, in deprivation of my rights;

2. You promoted friendship with the Queen of England by your visit to that country;

3. You won the war with Tibet, and made her pay to Nepal a huge sum of money every year;

4. You treated with respect and kindness my father, ex-King Rajendra Bikram Shah, in spite of his conspiracies against your life;

5. You exempted from death sentence and, instead, kept with respect in detention for five years my younger brother, Prince Upendra Bikram, who was an accomplice in a conspiracy against your life;

6. During your Prime Ministership, you have satisfied the nobility, the soldiery and the peasantry of Nepal, given them justice, and promoted peace and prosperity ;

7. You have increased the military force of Nepal, observed economy, and added to the state exchequer.

You have performed these acts of welfare. I had promised to abandon the throne if you resigned the Ministership. But I failed to fulfil my promise even though you resigned the Ministership. Without consulting the Queen and the nobles, I conferred the Prime Ministership after your resignation on your younger brother at your request. Keeping you without a post while I continue to sit on the throne is against the promise that I had undertaken. To keep so able a Minister without a post would be, in the eyes of the world, foolish on my part. For this reason:

You are hereby conferred the title of *Maharaja* of Kaski and Lamjung. Being the *Maharaja* of these places, you are authorised to prevent me from trying to coerce the nobility, the peasantry or the soldiery, or from disturbing the friendly relations with the Queen of England and the Emperor of China. At the time of your pre-

*Nepali text from Gurujyu Hemraj's *Vamsavali* (Rashtriya Pustakalaya, Kathmandu).

venting me from doing so, if I offer any forcible resistance, the nobility and the army will assist you. You will advise the Prime Minister, Bam Bahadur, if he defaults in matters of military, civil and administrative appointments and dismissals, and promotion of friendship with the Emperors of England and China. If he refuses to abide by your advice and resorts to any force, my chiefs, nobles and the army are hereby asked to act on your orders. You will keep the people of your estates happy. While performing justice, you are granted the power to give death sentence. You are also granted the power, for the period of your life-time, to kill anyone in my kingdom who tries to disturb the peace of your estates. All this will be enjoyed by you up to offspring upon offspring. In the roll of succession to the *Mukhtiyari* [Prime Ministership] fixed by me for your brothers, the *Mukhtiyari* after Dhir Shamsher Kunwar Ranaji is bestowed on your son Jagat Jang Kunwar Ranaji.

III

Abstract translation of the Lal-Mohar granted by King Surendra Bikram Shah of Nepal to Maharaja Jang Bahadur Ranaji, appointing him as Prime Minister for the second term, dated 1914 V.S., Asar Sudi 7, corresponding to 28 June 1857.*

I have appointed Sri Sri Sri Maharaja Jung Bahadoor Ranajee to be the head (the Malik) of my Kingdom, and have invested him with the titles of Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief; I have given him power to declare war, to make peace and to control the domestic arrangements of the State with full Military, Judicial and Civil authority in all cases; he is empowered to appoint or dismiss from public situations, to control the Punjnee [Pujani] or periodical tenure of appointments and enlistments, and I have also delegated to him the powers of life and death.

It will be his particular duty to keep up the friendship now existing between Nepal and the British and China Governments, as well as to preserve peace with Bhote (Thibet).

All persons under my authority whether they be Civil or Military Officers, Counsellors, Nobles, soldiers or subjects, are placed under him, and will carry on their duties in subordination to him; those who act in obedience to his orders will receive honours and titles from him, but he has been empowered to fine or to imprison, or even to put to death those who may disobey him; in fact he may do to them whatever he may think proper; but I have desired him at once to put to death all who will not obey him.

These powers are conferred upon him for his life time.

The above Lal Mohur was attested by

General Krishan Bahadoor
General Runodeep Singh
General Dhare Shumshere
General Bhugt Beer

and by the Raj Gooroos Bijay Raj and his son and by twelve others of the principal Military Sirdars.

(True abstract translation)

Sd/- C. H. Byers
Assistant Resident

**Foreign Secret Consultation* (25 September 1857) 473.

Appendix 4

Rolls of Succession*

*The roll as framed last by Jang Bahadur, dated 1924 V.S., Margh Sudi 10, corresponding to 3 February 1868.***

1. *Sri Tin Maharaj* Jang Bahadur Kunwar Rana Ji, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief;
2. Commander-in-Chief General Ranoddip Singh K.R.J. (Jang's brother);
3. Senior Commanding-General Jagat Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Western Command) (Jang's brother);
4. Commanding-General Dhir Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Eastern Command) (Jang's brother);
5. Commanding-General Jagat Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Southern Command) (Jang's son);
6. Commanding-General Jit Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Northern Command) (Jang's son);
7. General Padma Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Jang's son);
8. Any other legitimate son of Jang Bahadur, if born;
9. Lieutenant General Babar Jang K.R.J. (Jang's illegitimate son);
10. Lieutenant General Ranbir Jang K.R.J. (Jang's illegitimate son);
11. Yuddha Pratap Jang Bahadur K.R.J., the son of General Jagat Jang, from his wife—the Queen's daughter (Jang's grandson);
12. Any son, if born to General Jit Jang, from his wife—the Queen's daughter (Would be Jang's grandson).

The positions after the twelfth were given to the sons of Jang's six brothers, i.e. Jang's nephews, as follows.

13. Major General Kedar Narsingh K.R.J. (Badri Narsingh's son);
14. Major General Bam Bikram Bahadur K.R.J. (Bam Bahadur's son);
15. Major General Buddhi Bikram Bahadur K.R.J. (?);
16. Lieutenant Colonel Bir Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
17. Lieutenant Colonel Ambar Jang K.R.J. (Jagat Shamsher's son);
18. Lieutenant Colonel Dhoje Narsingh K.R.J. (Badri Narsingh's son);
19. Major General Ram Krishna K.R.J. (?);
20. Lieutenant Colonel Khadga Shamher K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
21. Lieutenant Colonel Bhupendra Jang K.R.J. (Jagat Shamsher's son);
22. Lieutenant Colonel Ran Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
23. Lieutenant Colonel Dev Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
24. Lieutenant Colonel Chandra Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);

*Data provided by Babu Ram Acharya, Kathmandu.

**The roll or rolls framed earlier than this date are not available.

25. Lieutenant Colonel Bir Bikram Jang K.R.J. (Bam Bahadur's son);
26. Lieutenant Colonel Bhim Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
27. Lieutenant Colonel Fateh Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
28. Lalit Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);

The positions after this were reserved for the legitimate sons (to be born) of Jang Bahadur and of his remaining three brothers. In the meantime, however, the positions were given to:

29. Lieutenant Colonel Bhairav Narsingh K.R.J. (Badri Narsingh's son);
30. Colonel Yaksha Bikram Bahadur K.R.J. (Bam Bahadur's son).

II

The roll that was effective at the time of the assassination of Ranoddip Singh on 22 November 1885.

1. *Maharaj* Ranoddip Singh K.R.J., Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief;
2. Commander-in-Chief General Jit Jang Bahadur K.R.J.;
3. Senior Commanding-General Padma Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Western Command);
4. Commanding-General Ranbir Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Eastern Command);
5. Commanding-General Yuddha Pratap Jang Bahadur K.R.J. (Southern Command);
6. Commanding-General Kedar Narsingh K.R.J. (Northern Command);
7. General Bir Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
8. General Ambar Jang K.R.J.;
9. General Dhoje Narsingh K.R.J.;
10. General Khadga Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
11. General Bhupendra Jang K.R.J.;
12. General Ran Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
13. General Dev Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
14. Colonel Chandra Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
15. Colonel Bhim Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
16. Colonel Fateh Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
17. Colonel Lalit Shamsher Jang K.R.J.;
18. Colonel Jit Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
19. Colonel Juddha Shamsher Jang K.R.J. (Dhir's son);
20. General Bhairav Narsingh K.R.J.;
21. General Yaksha Bikram K.R.J.

III

The roll made by Bir Shamsher after succeeding to the Prime Ministership.

1. *Sri Tin Maharaj* Bir Shamsher Jang Rana Bahadur, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief;

2. Commander-in-Chief General Khadga Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
3. Senior Commanding-General Ran Shamsher J.R.B. (Western Command) (Bir's brother);
4. Commanding-General Dev Shamsher J.R.B. (Eastern Command) (Bir's brother);
5. Commanding-General Chandra Shamsher J.R.B. (Southern Command) (Bir's brother);
6. Commanding-General Bhim Shamsher J.R.B. (Northern Command) (Bir's brother);
7. General Fateh Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
8. General Lalit Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
9. General Jit Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
10. Colonel Juddha Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's brother);
11. Colonel Gehendra Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's son);
12. Colonel Dharma Shamsher J.R.B. (Bir's son);
13. Colonel Padma Shamsher J.R.B. (Bhim Shamsher's son);
14. Colonel Punya Shamsher J.R.B. (Khadga Shamsher's son);
15. (?) (Khadga Shamsher's son).

IV

The roll as revised by Bir Shamsher in 1887, after the expulsion of Khadga Shamsher as a result of his complicity in a conspiracy, and after the death of Ran Shamsher.

1. Bir Shamsher*
2. Dev Shamsher
3. Chandra Shamsher
4. Bhim Shamsher
5. Fateh Shamsher
6. Lalit Shamsher
7. Jit Shamsher
8. Juddha Shamsher
9. Gehendra Shamsher
10. Dharma Shamsher
11. Chakra Shamsher (Bir's son)
12. Rudra Shamsher (Bir's son)
13. Padma Shamsher
14. Punya Shamsher
15. ?
16. Tej Shamsher (Bir's son)
17. Mohan Shamsher (Chandra Shamsher's son)
18. Pratap Shamsher (Bir's son)
19. Jang Shamsher (Dev's son)

*The rest of the description of these names and their titles, etc. are the same as in the roll immediately preceding.

Appendix 5

Glossary of Nepali Words*

Adalat: Court; also the name of lower courts (of first instance) in the hills, in the Rana period.

Adalat Goswara: An appellate court at the capital, in the Rana period.

Adda: An office or department.

Ain: Legal code.

Ain Khana: Law Department.

Amaldar: A lower military officer.

Amali: A subordinate civil functionary in the *tehsil*; at places, also the designation of a district authority.

Amini: Name of lower courts (of first instance) in the Tarai, in the Rana period.

Apil Adda: Name of the appellate court at the capital substituted for *Adalat Goswara* after 1901.

Bada Hakim: Designation of a district governor.

Bada Kausi: Central Treasury and Expenditure Department.

Bahidar: A military functionary.

Baisi: A group of twentytwo states or principalities in western Nepal.

Bajur Adda: A customs office.

Bhandar-Khal Dhukuti: Name of a special treasury.

Bharadars: "Bearers of the burden of the state," i.e. nobles, or members of the state council.

Bichari: A judicial officer.

Birami: Sick leave.

Birta: A land system by which the produce or revenue from land was enjoyed by the landholder without any obligations to the state, implying, particularly, the exemption of the landholder from the payment of tax.

Chakari: A sort of darbar held by the Rana Prime Minister for the civil and military officers.

Chaparasi: Peon.

Chaparasi Adda: A department which initially gaurded the palace and then the jail; later, it supervised road building.

Chaubisi: A group of twentyfour states or principalities in western Nepal.

Chaudhari: An officer in charge of revenue collection in the Tarai.

Chauki: A small police post.

Chaukidar: A village watchman in the Tarai.

Chautaria: One of the royal collaterals appointed usually to perform the functions of a chief minister, or a minister, or a councillor, in the early Shah period.

*This glossary includes only those words which have been used in this book with such meanings as they bear in the context of the book.

Later, the *Chautarias* functioned as a political faction. They were also appointed to important administrative posts like governor of a district.

Chobadar: A royal attendant.

Chyangre Kausi: Name of a treasury.

Daftar or *Dafdar Khana*: Records Room.

Dan: A charitable subscription.

Dara: Sub-division of a *tehsil*.

Daroga: A subordinate police officer.

Dhansar: Name of a court.

Dharmadhikar: A judicial officer who advised on or decided cases involving explanation or interpretation of *dharmasastra*; he functioned more or less as the chief judge for dealing with criminal cases in the pre-Rana period.

Dharmasastras: Hindu religious texts laying down the code of behaviour for society. They have formed the basis of many a legal enactment.

Dharmabhakaunya: Serving an oath.

Dharam Kachahari: The name of an anti-corruption court.

Dhoka Dvarya: A guard.

Dittha: A judicial officer.

Duniyadar: Term used by the Ranas to refer to the common people as distinguished from themselves, literally meaning "of this world."

Dvare (or *Dvarya*): A royal guard.

Faujdar: A subordinate officer in the district.

Guon: Sub-division of a *thum*, *dara* or *garkha*, literally meaning "village."

Garib: Poor.

Garkha: Sub-division of a *tehsil*.

Gaura: A district office in the hills; also, the name of appellate courts.

Goswara: A district office in the Tarai.

Guru: Royal adviser on matters of Hindu law (a Brahman).

Gurujyu: An honorific prefix or suffix of a *guru* or *rajguru*.

Hajari Goswara: An office to take note of the attendance of government servants, prepare reports about their work, etc.

Hakim: A person in charge of an office, an administrative unit, or district government, etc.

Havaladar: A lower military officer.

Ilaka: A synonym for *tehsil* or *jilla*.

Ilayachi Kothi: A Nepalese Consulate Office at Patna.

Inta Chapli: Name of a court.

Jagera: The state of being put in reserve to be subsequently employed elsewhere, at the occasion of the annual screening of all civil and military appointments. The term was also used to mean *raikar* (Crown) land which had not been assigned as *jagir*.

Jagir: A government employment fetching remuneration, usually in the form of a piece of land from which produce or revenue was enjoyed by the employee, and sometimes in cash also, or partly in kind and partly in cash. (Thus, the term was also used to mean the total salary of a person in kind or in cash, or the part salary in kind.)

Jagire: One holding a *jagir*.

Jamadar: A military or police functionary.

Jangi Adda: Defence department.

Jangi Bandobast: Military organisation.

Jangi Lat: The senior commanding-general (western command).

Jaisi Kotha: Name of the Tibetan section of the Foreign Office.

Jimindar: A revenue collector in the Tarai.

Jilla: An administrative division of Nepal.

Jyotishi: Astronomer.

Kaji: A civil officer; also, designation of a minister or a chief minister in the early Shah period.

Kangal: Destitute.

Kapardur: A minister of the king's household, or an officer in charge of the government valuables, civil stores, etc.

Katuval: A civil functionary.

Kau: Name of a low caste.

Kausal: Council.

Kausi: Government department dealing with the expenditure of money (an abbreviated expression for *kausi tosakhana*).

Kausi Tosakhana: Government department dealing with the expenditure of money.

Khadga Nisana: Executive order of the Rana Prime Minister bearing his seal containing the print of a *khadga*, i.e. sword.

Khana: An office or department.

Khanagi: Land whose revenue was enjoyable as salary.

Khاردar (or *Kharidar*): An office superintendent or a clerk.

Khazanchi: A treasurer.

Khukuri: A dagger-like Nepalese weapon having a curved blade.

Kitab Khana (or *Kamyandari Kitab Khana*): An office keeping the civil and military register.

Ko: Of or about.

Kot Linga: Name of a court.

Kumari Chok: Accounts and Audit department.

Kumbhedun: A military officer.

Lain Jamadar Sarajang: A military functionary.

Lal: Red.

Lal-Mohar: A legal instrument by which the king confers titles, honours, offices and *jagirs*, ratifies legislation and issues ordinances, etc.; known so because of the red seal which is put on the document along with the royal signatures.

Mades Bandobast: Tarai administration, particularly pertaining to revenue. (A sub-office of *Muluki Adda*.)

Mahania: A functionary attached to the courts.

Muharaja: Title of the Rana Prime Minister after 1856, before which it was the title of the king, meaning "a great king."

Maharajadhiraj: Title of the king, meaning "king of the great kings."

Maha-Samant: Chief of the chieftains.

Mal Adda: Revenue office.

Mauza: Sub-division of a *thum*, *dara*, or *garkha*, a village.

Mir Munsī (or *Amir Munsī*): Executive head of the Foreign Office.

Mir-Subba: A civil officer.

Mohar: Seal.

Mukhiya: A subordinate civil functionary in the *tehsil*.

Mukhtiyar: Designation of the chief minister in the pre-Rana and the early Rana period, and of the commander-in-chief in most of the Rana period.

Mukhya Chautaria: The seniormost among the *Chautarias* if there were more than one appointed by the king.

Muluki Adda: Home and general department.

Muluki Ain: Legal code of the country.

Muluki Khana: Central Treasury in the Rana period.

Muluki Subba: A civil officer.

Munsī: A civil functionary.

Munsī Khana: Foreign Office.

Nach-ghar: Theatre hall.

Nausinda: A Civil functionary.

Ninahalaunya: Dispensing justice.

Nyaya: Justice.

Nyayasastra: Jurisprudence.

Pahar Bandobast: Hill administration, particularly that pertaining to revenue (A sub-office of *Muluki Adda*).

Pajani: An institution by which the king renewed all civil and military appointments of the state every year, resulting in the continuation or confirmation of the previous appointments, or modifications in the nature and tenure of existing appointments, or dismissals and new appointments.

Panch: Five.

Panditjyu: An honorific suffix of a *guru*, *rajguru*, or *purohit*.

Panja: Palm-print of the ruler with signatures, put on letters, documents, etc.

Patvari: A revenue collector in the Tarai.

Prayam Minister: Prime Minister.

Purohit: Priest.

Rajguru: Chief royal adviser on matters of Hindu law (a Brahman).

Rytar Adjutant Kote: A military functionary.

Sadar: Central.

Salami: (i) A sort of darbar held by the Rana Prime Minister for the common people; (ii) a sort of annual tax levied on the soldiers by their master or officer.

Samants: Chieftains.

Sanad: A letter of appointment.

Saraf Khana: An office to exchange Nepalese money for foreign money.

Sardar: A military officer in the early Shah period; later, the designation of a civil officer also.

Shahar Saphai: A department to look after sanitation.

Siaha: Ledger or account book.

Sipahi: Soldier.

Sitalodaka; River of cold water.

Sri; An honorific prefix.

Subba; A civil officer of rank, sometimes the head of a district.

Subedar; A military officer.

Subedar Insayen; A military functionary.

Sudra; Fourth grade in the caste-based Hindu social hierarchy.

Tabela Dalun; A special court against corruption.

Tahvils; Cash balances.

Taksar; Name of a court.

Tehsil; An administrative division of Nepal.

Thamauti; Continuation of an appointment at the annual *pajani*.

Thana; Police office.

Thar-ghars; Chiefs of some selected castes who held charge of the principal offices of the state in the pre-Rana and the early Rana period.

Tharokhosuwa; Power of the Rana Prime Minister to dismiss any one at any time in spite of the *pajani*, with or without reasons.

Thum; Sub-division of a *tehsil*.

Tin; Three.

Top Khana; Office in charge of guns, or store-house to keep guns.

Tosakhana; King's household, wardrobe, etc.; also the name of the department of expenditure.

Vaidya; A physician practising the indigenous system.

Vaisva; Third grade in the caste-based Hindu social hierarchy.

Vakil; Diplomatic envoys at Calcutta and Lhasa.

Vamsavali; Genealogical history.

Vinti Patra; A petition, appeal or complaint.

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